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CEREBUS
mothers & daughters
34

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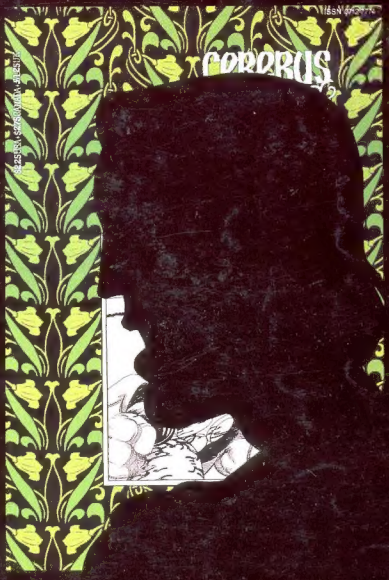

184
JUL

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

Today, synchronistically, I got two letters in the mail which both addressed an idea that is long overdue for inclusion in this space. John Holland who is getting ready to self-publish DIEBOLD (104 Oak Court, Westwego, LA 70094: $2.95 per copy. The first two issues will have covers by Sam Kieth and Mike Zeck) and Steve Lafler who sent along the first issue of BUGHOUSE (495 Elwood Ave. #5, Oakland, CA, 94610) both suggested selling the original artwork to their books in order to raise much-needed capital.

It was Brian (the artist half of the DIEBOLD team) who came up with the idea of pre-selling the artwork. Basically, their patrons (which is really what they are) paid for the artwork in advance. In exchange, each buyer gets a random page, as well as their name in the comic on the page they'll receive (below the artwork, of course). The art buyers, thus, became partners in getting the comic published. Which gave John and Brian the name for their company: Silent Partners.

Steve Lafler, on the other hand, circulated a letter offering pages for sale and included a copy of the book.

Now.

Some guys will do this and some won't. Ger and I don't sell our pages for the most part because it is just a colossal pain in the ass. Everyone wants the same pages. No one wants the other pages (have you got one with Cerebus-in-costume-using-his-powers?). A vast majority of art collectors want to haggle — you know, can they have fifty bucks off if they buy two pages? All I can afford is half of your asking price, can you give me a deal? Pleasepleaseplease.

But back at the beginning, I definitely sold the pages — usually for ten dollars each. For the first two years, getting an extra two hundred dollars out of an issue by selling the artwork made one hell of a difference. As long as we had the negatives for reprinting, the artwork was (and is) just a raw material. The printed comic book is the finished work. The artwork is like the paper stock or the staples — a necessary element in the final equation.

I'm not saying you should sell your artwork and I'm not saying you shouldn't. I'm not saying you should sell it for a lot of money and I'm not saying you should sell it for a little bit of money. But, if you're interest is in establishing yourself as a reliable writer/artist/publisher, if you want to see your tenth or your twentieth issue come out on schedule, then at some point, I think you have to face whether you want to do that *by whatever means are necessary* or if you are going to permit some inner need to own your artwork stand in the way. If the difference between selling your artwork or not selling your artwork is the difference between making a go of it or becoming another self-publishing casualty, then I really think you have to look long and hard at your own motives. Put another way, how valuable is it going to be to have all of the artwork to your first three issues if you can't afford to print your fourth issue and you have to go out of business?

★★★★★★★★★★

On a related note, I find commissioned work to be a royal pain in the ass as well. It is very easy to promise an original piece to someone. It is very easy to take money for it. Then the money is gone and you still have to work another piece of artwork into your schedule.

As a self-publisher, if you are able to get a core following for your work and build on that, every page that you produce will continue to earn revenues for you every time that you reprint it. All things being equal, that can be for the rest of your life. A commissioned piece is the same thing as taking money out of a banking machine. You can't really remember what you spent the money on, but it is definitely all gone.

And don't count on the art collector to send you a check for two dollars every time they stop and look at the piece you did hanging on their wall.

The art game doesn't work that way.

As long as your energies go into writing and drawing the next page (and the next page and the next page) until the issue is done, in my opinion, you are making the best use of your time and talent. It is a long-term investment in your own future. Be the proprietor of your own intellectual property first and foremost. If selling the original artwork helps move you from 'hanging on by your fingernails' to being 'comfortably established', I think it's a sensible trade-off from the vantage point of a far-sighted proprietor.

CEREBUS

NO. 184 **JULY 1994**

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

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BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
Reads

•

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to Cerebus 200)

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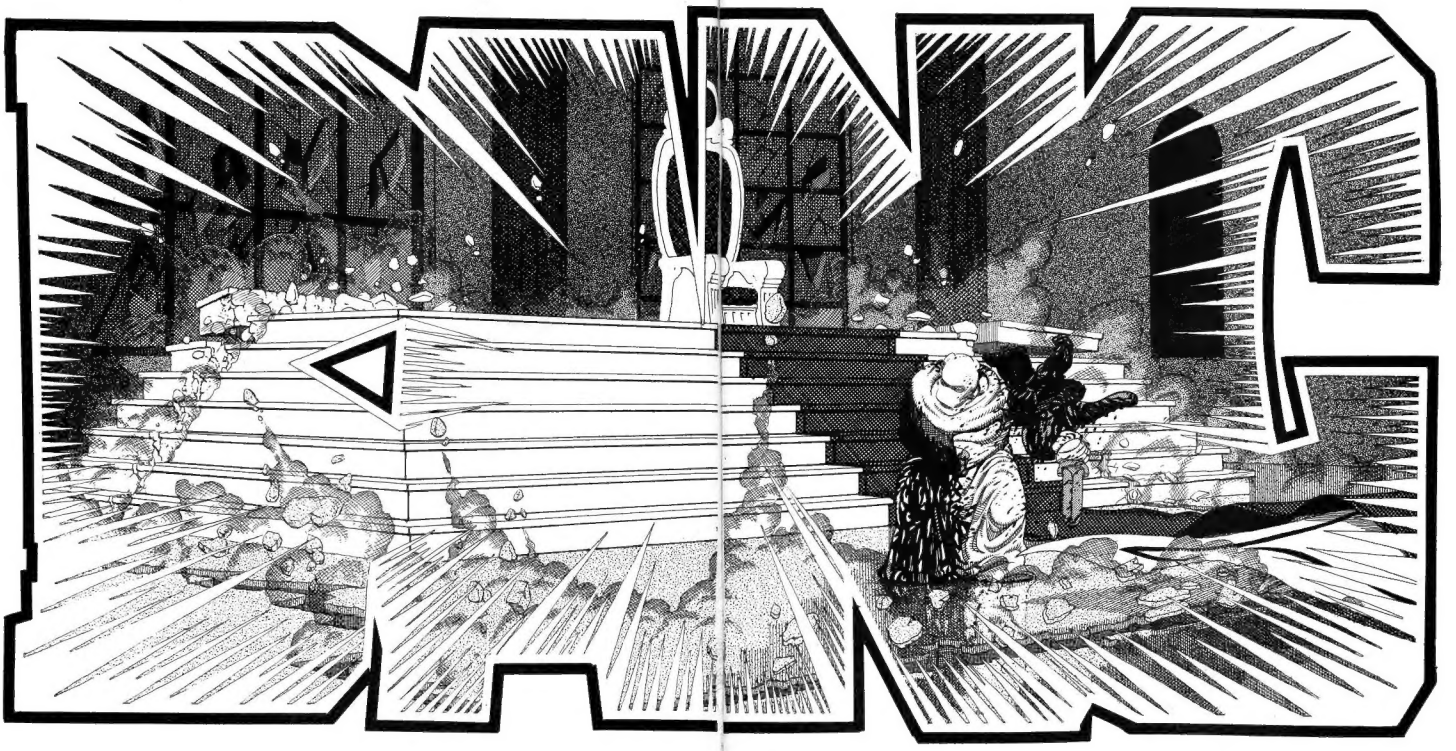

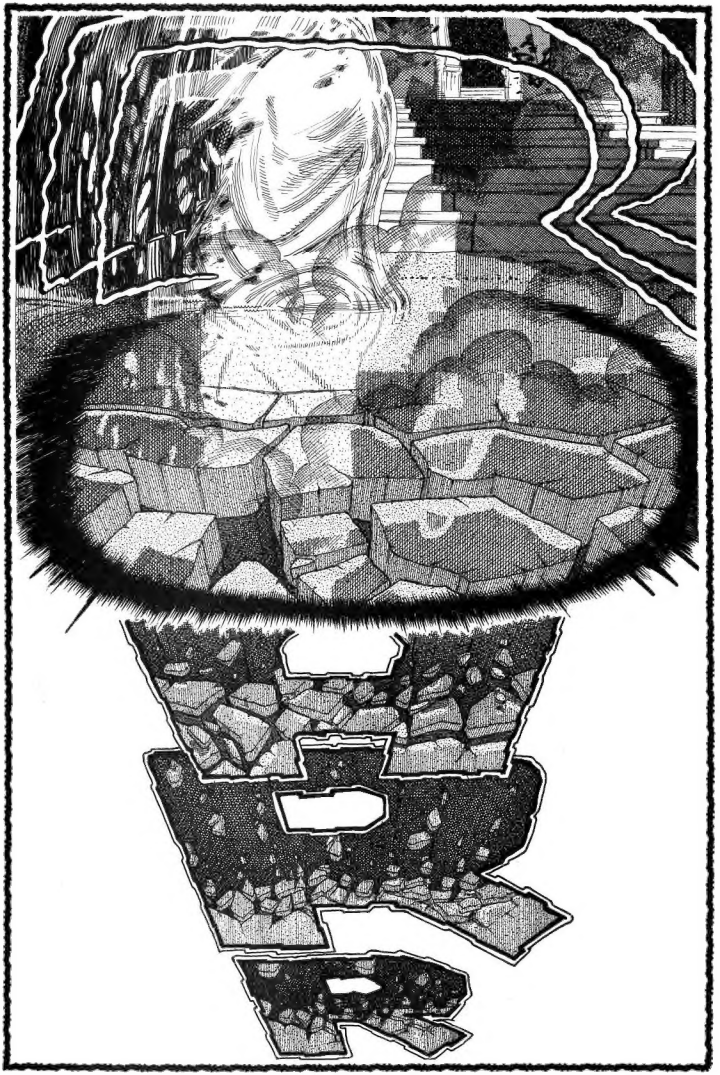

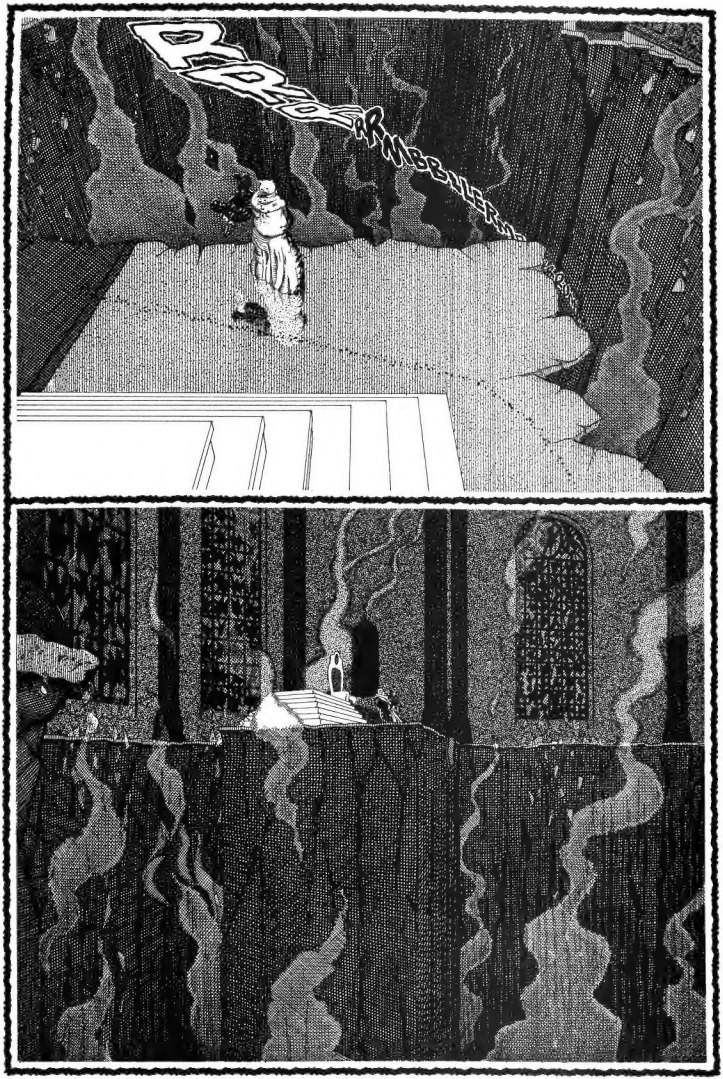
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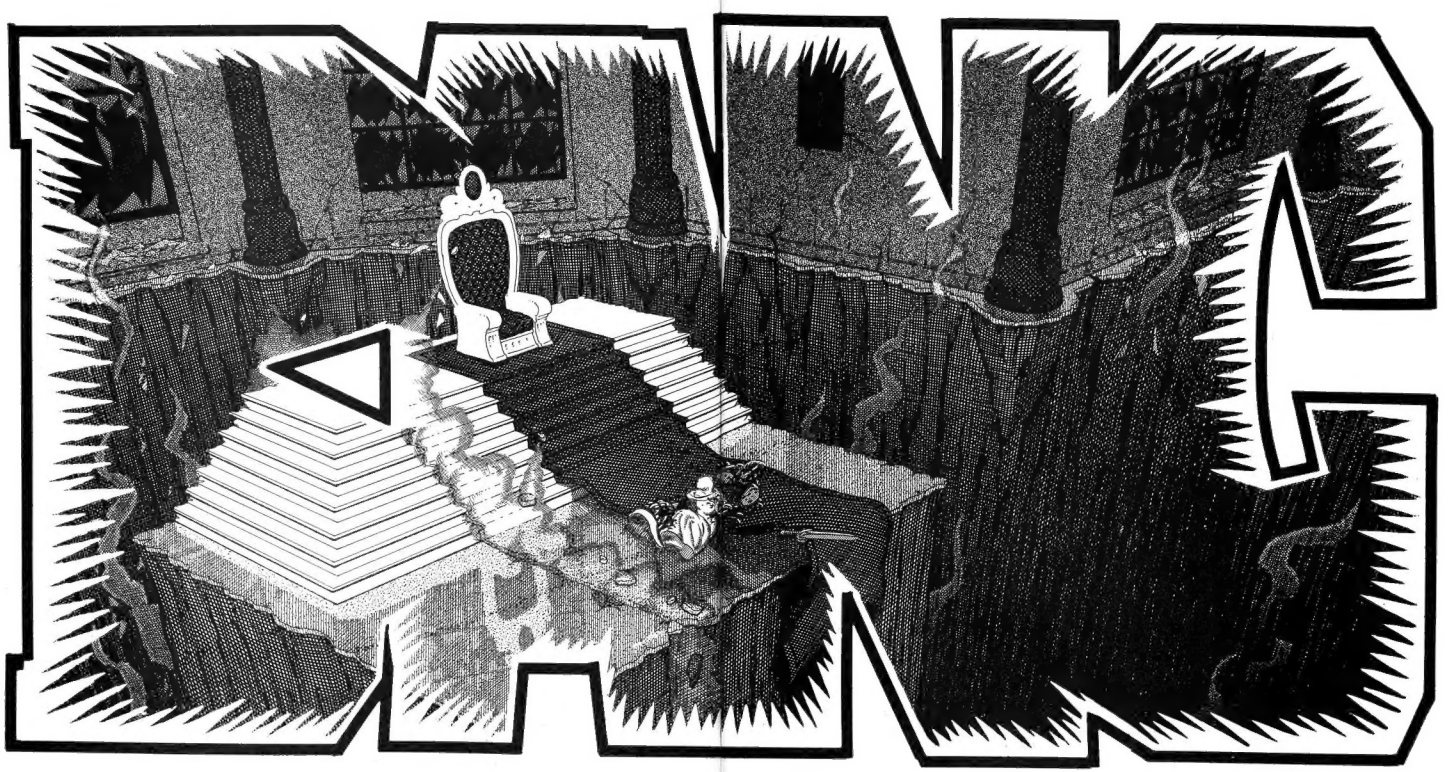

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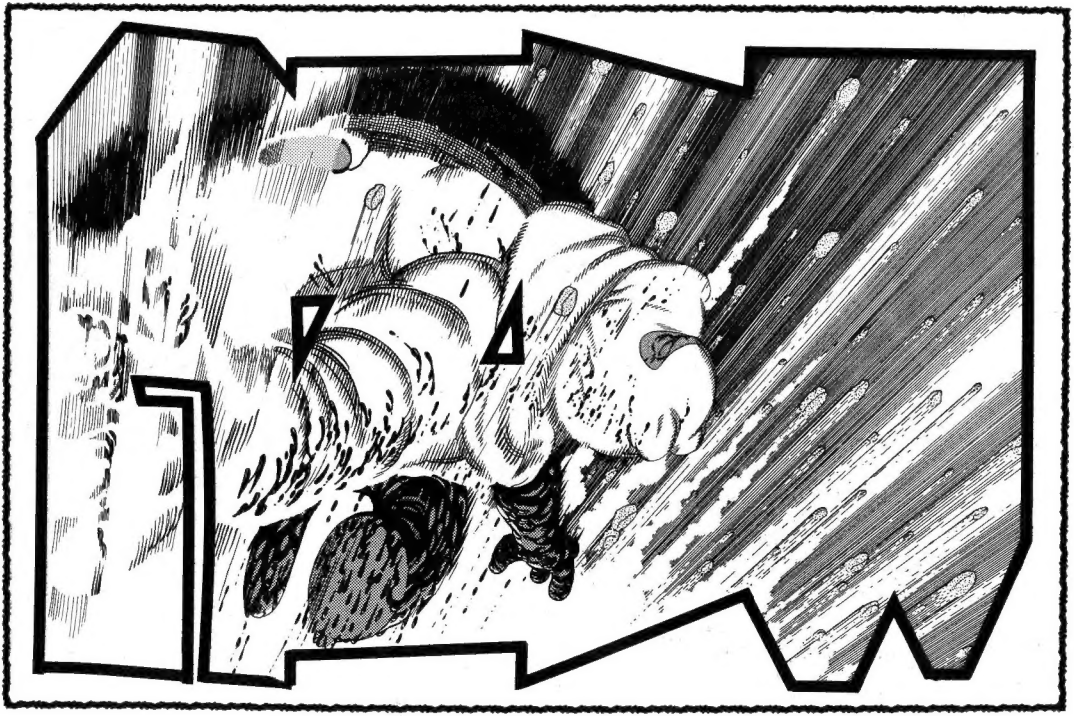

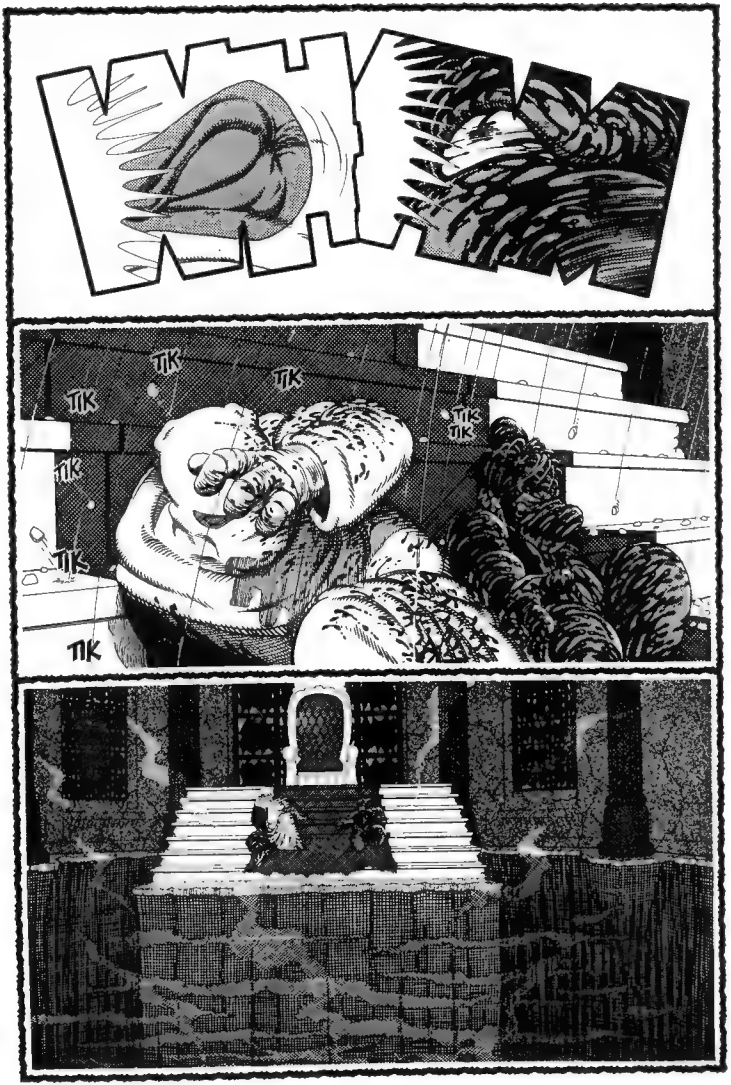
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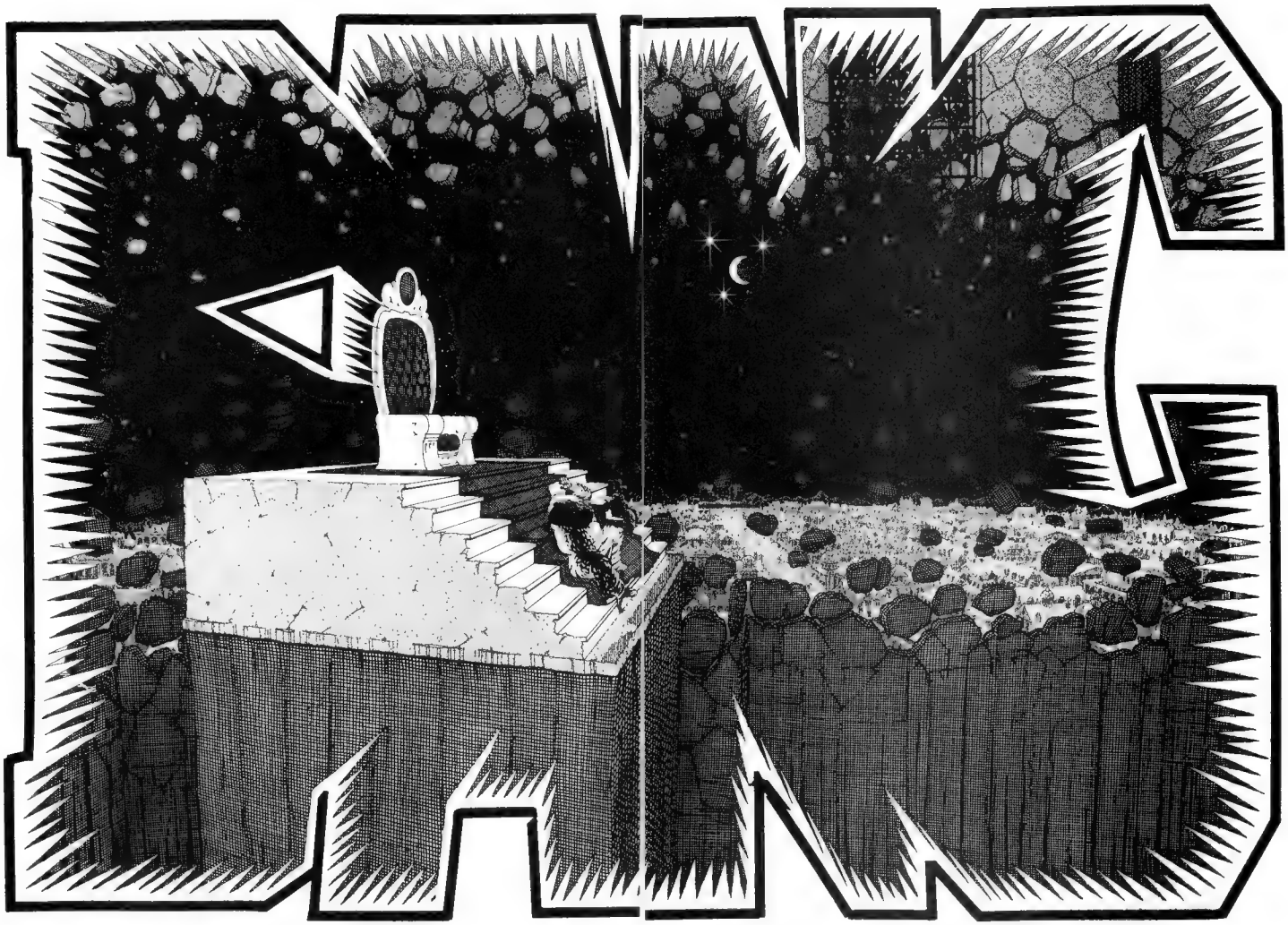


A hard, laminated rectangle was clutched in the reader's right hand. A haze of moisture, of perspiration, spilled outwards from fingers and thumb — blurring the gold display lettering set against a black field: VIKTOR DAVIS: ACCESS ALL AREAS, it declared. Inset, below the lettering, was a reproduction of the cover of Cerebus *issue 181. Above the heads of the exultant, jostling, tightly packed*

crowd, over the passageways which emptied into the (stadium? arena?), were colourful reproductions of *Cerebus* covers. In passing, the reader recognized the red and black montage of Carl Jung's paintings and the Artemis 'tarot card' illustration. Black stencilled lettering beneath it read 'ACCESS 174'. The reader began to push forward in the direction of the familiar black and gold wallpaper pattern of issue 175. Nearby, someone with a pink spray-can was embellishing lime-green balloon lettering which covered several square feet of cement wall space: ELROD LIVES. Above and to the right, in a yellow starburst, someone had spray-painted BONE RULES in magenta and navy-blue script. Across the final three letters, another had added (in purple magic marker) CEREBUS GOVERNS. The reader narrowly avoided a collision with a stadium security guard, his cap turned at a jaunty angle, taking a long hard pull on a hash pipe imaginatively modified from the barrel and cylinder of a .38 caliber revolver.

As the reader approached the distinctive green rectangle of the issue 181 cover, a hand reached out, snaring the reader's left bicep. The hand, naturally enough, was attached to an arm, the arm to a shoulder. Above the shoulder was a face which bore an eerie resemblance to Frank Zappa, only heavier set, more solidly built.

'I *thought* I'd find you out here. You were supposed to go to the backstage entrance. I'm Ken Viola — I'm the one who did the *Masters of* . . .' His next words were drowned out as the familiar opening chords to *My Astoria* came booming through the public address system, prompting a noisy and enthusiastic reaction. The reader leaned closer, the reader's ear now mere inches from the Frank Zappa face. '. . . for the Grateful Dead and the Stones. *This* way!'

The reader fell in behind, as Ken Viola pushed his way (expertly) through the crowd in the direction of an unmarked doorway which was flanked by two burly guards wearing yellow VIKTOR DAVIS T-shirts. They each took a meaningful, menacing step towards the reader.

'They're with *me*,' Viola shouted over his shoulder and the duo stepped back, re-crossing their arms as they did so. The door opened fractionally and the reader slipped in behind. Viola joined a small group just inside the door as the reader's eyes adjusted to the indirect lighting of the large, comfortably furnished room. There was a party in progress.

'No. No humans,' someone was saying as the reader moved forward. The reader recognized Steve Bissette from the *Rare Bit* preview. 'There weren't any humans in the Upper Cretaceous period.' He was addressing a young couple dressed entirely in leather, with purple, spiked hair and matching nose rings. 'How did the dinosaurs dress? That's what *I* want to know,' asked someone next to him wearing a 'Fiasco Comics: Feel the Desperation' T-shirt. 'I mean did they wear bowling shirts or neckties or what?' 'Shut up, Don,' laughed Bissette. The reader's attention was attracted to a tall, middle-aged gentleman asleep in a gray arm-chair, a paper Fiasco Comics hat pulled down over one eye.

'Rick Veitch,' said a voice to the reader's left. The reader turned to see Viktor Davis gesturing with a green Heineken bottle towards the somnambulent figure.

'He's working on his next issue.' This was greeted with a burst of laughter from the party-goers in the immediate vicinity. Viktor Davis tucked his cigarette into the corner of his mouth and extended his right hand, gripping the reader's own, tightly and enthusiastically. 'Glad you could make it,' he said. From nowhere, a young man with curly hair appeared, his face flushed and his eyes glittering. His white dress shirt was unbuttoned to the waist and smeared with lipstick. 'Well, Martin?' asked Viktor. 'She kept yelling, *DO me, Gunther! DO me, Gunther.*' Viktor exploded with laughter. He set the beer bottle down on a nearby table and ground out his cigarette in an overflowing ashtray. He picked up a jacket made of some iridescent green material from the back of a chair. He shrugged into it. Ken Viola appeared from Viktor's left, stepping in front of him. Viktor did up the middle button. 'Looks better unbuttoned,' said Viola. Viktor contemplated the button for moment and undid it. 'Ready when you are,' he said. 'Let's do it,' Viola replied. Viktor turned to the reader. 'Come on.'

'Give 'em hell,' someone shouted as they pushed through a door marked *fire exit*. The closing door extinguished the sound of the party. They were in a brightly lit cinder-block hallway, walking quickly in single file, Viola in the lead, Viktor behind him. They approached a heavy, dark curtain which Viola pulled aside. 'Rude, rude, rude,' he said, grinning at Viktor and the reader. From somewhere a deep bass vibration tickled the bottom of the reader's feet. 'I wish I were nude,' said Viktor. He and Viola high-fived each other.

'You, too,' said Viola, gesturing into the darkness beyond the curtain. He gently pushed the reader through. 'Go. Go — you have to keep up.'

Up ahead, the reader could see Viktor Davis ascending a narrow cement staircase flanked by heavy iron railings. The reader followed as the resonant bass resolved itself into a familiar song.

We'd like to thank you once again.

The reader's heart did a back-flip. It was the reprise to 'Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band'. This is impossible, thought the reader. I must be dreaming.

Sergeant Pepper's one and only Lonely Hearts Club Band.

Viktor Davis grinned back at the reader from the halfway point on the stairs, silhouetted against the bright rectangle of a doorway looming above him.

'If Rick Veitch ever wakes up, we're *all* in trouble,' he shouted.

It's getting very near the end.

The reader felt buoyant, elated. The reader's legs endeavoured to move more quickly, to close the gap between reader and author. Viktor Davis was now almost to the top of the stairs. The air was resistant, holding the reader back.

Sergeant Pepper's Lonely

Sergeant Pepper's Lonely

Sergeant Pepper's Lonely

The roar of the crowd wrestled with the music, the two rising in tandem to a nearly unimaginable crescendo. Viktor Davis had reached the top of the stairs.

Heaaaaarts . . .

Almost there, thought the reader. I'm almost there.

Cluuuubbb . . .

Viktor Davis disappeared from view, into the rectangle of light which was now a deep vermillion.

Baaaaandd . . .

The reader ascended the last few steps even as the roar of the crowd began to fade (just like on the record, thought the reader) and the music with it. The rectangle of light (as the reader reached it) darkened from vermillion to an ugly brown and was replaced by a diffuse blue-white. The reader passed through into the arena.

It was the largest stadium the reader had ever seen: five different levels which stretched away to the horizon on either side and which seemed to ascend to the very heavens themselves. The echo of the reader's footsteps reflected back to the reader's ears (after a delay of two or three seconds). Ahead of the reader stood Viktor Davis, leaning on a railing, lighting a cigarette. Wavering yellow light illuminated a large 'No Smoking' sign.

The stadium was empty.

The reader approached Viktor Davis slowly. The air was still and the smoke from his cigarette rose in an impossibly thin blue-gray stream into the sky, where it vanished from sight. The green jacket was gone, replaced by a well-worn black T-shirt. As the reader approached, white lettering became visible.

Bratpack, it said.

As the reader reached a point adjacent to the author, smaller lettering was visible.

Live fast. Love hard.

And beneath that: *Die with your mask on.*

To the right of the motto something had been covered over with red paint. To the left of the motto was the stylised skull of the King Hell Press logo.

The reader joined Viktor Davis. The railing was covered in a fine layer of frost which retreated from the reader's palms.

It was cold.

Everything was very cold.

'Comics books are not like rock 'n' roll,' said Viktor Davis. 'What would I do when I got to the stage? Eat my bran muffin and open my

morning mail?' He took a thoughtful drag on his cigarette. 'You'd be surprised at the number of cartoonists who keep waiting for it to turn *into* rock 'n' roll. I remember all the long faces back in 1990, or whenever it was that the Turtles movie came out. They might as well have had big thought balloons over their heads: 'Shit! It wasn't me! The first millionaire, the best-selling toy line, the hit movie! It was supposed to be ME, dammit! ME! ME! ME!'

I can never understand what people like that are doing in the comic-book field. Okay — that's a bit disingenuous — I *do* understand. They're like would-be starlets who hang around in drugstores in Hollywood, waiting to be 'discovered'. A friend of mine who used to own a nightclub up in Kingston was talking to me about the Turtles one time; he had been on a plane going somewhere and was sitting next to the chick who 'put on all of their stadium shows' (you know, that *Pizza Hut* thing?). So he's telling her how his kids are MAJOR Turtles fans and she takes his name and address and says she'll send him an autograph, which arrived a little while later. 'Oh, yeah?' I asked — 'which one: Kevin or Peter?' 'Donatello,' he says. 'Who the hell are Kevin and Peter?'

I love that story.

I remember seeing Vaughn Bodé in Toronto at the 1974 Cosmicon . . . 1975, maybe. It was at the time that he was doing his 'Cartoon Concerts'. He had the Robert Plant hair. He had a skintight velour top with a big gold star on the chest. Skintight pants. An absolute *cloud* of perfume around him. His fingernails all came to a point, perfectly manicured. I went up and asked him if I could do an interview with him (I was one of *those* fans; I did the interviews in *Comic Art News & Reviews* — most of them at big Toronto cons). 'Maybe later,' he said. Then he just sort of wandered around the dealers' room. Not looking at anything. Not talking to anyone. Just, you know, being THE Vaughn Bodé.

The 'Cartoon Concert' was basically a slide show: each slide a different panel. Bodé was off to one side with a microphone, acting out all of the parts. He did Cheech Wizard with W.C. Fields' voice. That ruined it for me. To me, Cheech Wizard had the voice of that guy in the *Dead End Kids* (Huntz Hall or Leo Gorcey, I can never remember which one is which: the wise-ass one who mis-pronounced everything). I stopped reading *Cheech Wizard* shortly after that.

Comic books are not a communal activity. I get a lot of mail from people who read *Cerebus* and haven't the slightest interest in going to a Viktor Davis store signing or a convention where Viktor Davis is a featured guest. They go to their local store, they pick up their *Cerebus* and then they split. That's one of the more interesting things about comic books. If you add up all the people who go to signings and conventions, it probably amounts to a very small fraction of the total readership. When I visited Eddie Campbell in Australia, he had something on the order of a hundred unpublished pages of *From Hell* in photocopy form. The second day at his place, I scooped them up, went out back and started reading. I finished about forty pages and Eddie came out and started talking to me. Don't you hate that? I mean, don't you just *hate* that? When you're trying to read a really good comic book and someone is trying to talk to you at the same time? 'F'cryin' out loud, Eddie, I'm reading *From Hell* here!'

That's why comic books are not like rock 'n' roll.

For fuck's sake, Mick, will you shut up? I'm trying to listen to *Dirty Work!*

Much closer together now. Just like I said.

You're reading *Cerebus* and I'm talking to you. I'm talking to you and you're reading *Cerebus.*

Maybe you lit up a joint when you started and it's 'kicking in'. There are pages left to go. You can feel them in your right hand. Maybe you have a glass of wine or a bag of your favourite cookies.

They (*whoever they are*) won't be coming over for another half-hour.

That television show (*whatever it is*) isn't on yet.

You just started your lunch hour.

You just put the kids to bed.

There's another twenty minutes until the (*bus, train, subway*) reaches your stop.

It's just me and you. You and me.

You, me.

And the story.

The reader was suddenly aware that the stadium was growing insubstantial. The railing was gone. The reader was sitting down (when did that happen?). Viktor Davis' voice was gone as well. Again, all was darkness, but this time the feeling was not unsettling. It seemed the most natural thing in the world, just being here. Being here in the *Cerebus* story.

'We're going back now,' said Viktor Davis, from somewhere nearby. 'We're going back to the end of *Church & State*. The part about Terim and Tarim. Remember? The void and that tiny point of light. The light that might have been an inch across or a million miles across.'

Viktor Davis heaved a sigh. It sounded as if the weight of fifteen years were being lifted from his shoulders.

'I never thought I'd get here,' he said. And then he laughed. The sound was not unpleasant, this time.

'There she is,' he said.

The reader's eyes darted from side to side.

'No, no, right there,' he said. 'You're looking right at her.'

The reader saw nothing but darkness.

'Exactly,' said Viktor Davis.

The Void.

The Big Empty.

Consider the void. Not the void. The Void. She's aware. Oh, yes, just as I said. One Single Void Consciousness.

Consider the known universe. Not the Known Universe. The known universe. Picture it as a tree, a redwood: bursting upward and outward, a slow-motion explosion that has taken hundreds and hundreds of years to reach fruition. Picture yourself as a microbe at the base of that tree, staring up at it. Pretty impressive, isn't it? How long would a microbe have to climb to reach the first branch? How long would a microbe have to climb that redwood to reach the topmost branch: the topmost leaf on the topmost branch? If microbes had lips, you'd probably emit a long, slow whistle at this point.

The Known Universe, you'd say to yourself, feeling Truly Humbled and Strangely Microbianly God-Like in your new awareness.

The Void laughs. The Void thinks that's pretty funny.

Through the miracle of Cerebus Technology, suddenly, little microbe, You Are There. The topmost branch of the tallest redwood, climbing slowly to the topmost leaf on that topmost branch.

You've brought a little flag with you, which you plant in the topmost vein of the topmost leaf. You carefully take out your little microbe camera and take a few pictures. You take some readings on your little microbe gizmo. You switch on the microphone of your little microbe communicator. Far below you immense crowds of microbes surge around a loudspeaker. You clear your microbe throat and prepare for The Most Significant Broadcast in Microbe History.

I'm speaking to you, you intone, emotion welling within your microbe breast, *from the End of the Known Universe.*

The crowd goes wild.

The furthest star.

No, not *the furthest star that you can see through the Hubble Space Telescope* — that's not even up to the first knothole on the redwood, which is a good fifty feet or so below the first branch.

The Furthest Star. Way, way, way, way, *WAY* out there.

And there you are. Circling a medium-sized star in your little Luke Skywalker orbiter. To one side of you, there's a field of stars, *stretching out into infinity* (once a microbe, always a microbe). *All Right. All right. Stretching out a long, long ways.*

To the other side? Blackness. Nothing but blackness.

Her.

'My voice is coming to you over a small intercom inset in your Luke Skywalker orbiter. You'll notice the little *trademark Lucasfilm* label on everything. You can't be too careful, you know. We're now backing away from the medium-sized star, picking up speed.' Through the forward screen, the reader could see the known universe beginning to retreat. 'Now we're headed for

the first branch — just like when you were a microbe. One big jump.' Suddenly, the shape of the known universe was visible, a vast irregular globe of dust particles, stars, swirling galaxies, rushing in towards one another. 'Cerebus Technology — hyperspace — whatever you want to call it. The net effect is that we're going back through time, outracing the light that's coming from all of those galaxies. Another big jump.' Now the mass condensed even further, a series of swollen clouds of light assembled about a point of convergence, locked in slow orbit. 'Another big jump.' The swollen clouds coalesced into globes of light: turned different colours, diminished in size. At their center a giant red globe formed, tendrils of energy draining into it from the satellite globes, which began to shrink, vanishing, one at a time. 'Another big jump.' Now the satellite globes had shrunk to almost nothing. The central sphere as well had diminished in size, its colour changing from red to blue to yellow to white. 'Another big jump.' Now there was no trace of the satellite globes whatsoever, just an immaculate single white point of light. The point of light vanished. 'Another big jump.' All was blackness. 'Another bigger jump.' All was blackness. 'Five more big jumps in one.' All was blackness.

'And here we are,' said Viktor Davis. 'The blank page.'

A small white globe appeared from nowhere. The reader blinked.

'Creation,' said Viktor Davis. 'Appearance,' he added.

'Are the two terms redundant?' The reader thought for a moment. 'That's a rhetorical question. It's the central issue, the Bone (if Jeff Smith will forgive me) of Contention. Tons and tons of coal, pressing down on a single spot for thousands of years, will produce a diamond. As far as She's concerned, that's it. Case Closed. Debate over. 'I made it. It's mine.' The reader was hypnotised by the . . . strange, glowing . . . white . . . .

'Uh-huh,' said Viktor Davis. 'The Big Round Glowing White Strange Thing. What you call the known universe is still there, but we're so far away that it would take trillions and trillions and . . . you get the idea . . . of years for the light to get out here. If you want a closer look, you just hit the button in front of you.'

The reader wanted a closer look. The reader definitely wanted a closer look.

It was . . .

'Indescribable?' asked Viktor Davis.

Yes. Yes. Indescribable. Magnificent. Awe-inspiring . . . it was . . . it was . . .

'Sublime, was the word that they used to use. The dictionary definition doesn't do it justice: *lofty, grand, or exalted in thought, expression or manner; of outstanding spiritual, intellectual or moral worth; tending to inspire awe, usually because of elevated quality (as of beauty, nobility, or grandeur) or transcendent excellence; high in place, lofty of mien.* My dictionary follows this with *HAUGHTY*, in caps naturally. Some insignificant troll of an academic just HAD to add that one. Sticks out like a wet seven-letter fart at a formal banquet. Does he look *haughty* to you?'

No, the reader thought. No — to describe it . . . him . . . as 'haughty' was an insult. A grave insult.

'The first white men to see Niagara Falls used the word. Can you imagine hacking your way through the wilderness, that thunderous roar just getting louder and louder and Louder and LOUDER? It's an age before loudspeakers, before amplified sound of any kind. It would seem like thunder, but constant, immutable. You burst through the last of the dense woods and scrub and bushes, and there you are, standing atop sheer cliffs which drop precipitously into a wide gorge. And there . . . It . . . is. A wide curtain of white water, deafeningly loud. Thousands upon thousands upon thousands of gallons of water, hurtling towards the precipice at forty miles per hour, plunging one hundred and seventy feet, the impact obscured by a dense, impenetrable white mist, every second. Every. Second.

'You were terrified. You were awe-stricken. It was as if you were looking at God Himself. And when you returned to Quebec City or Albany? No photographs. No cassette recorders. No video cameras.

'It's big, you say. It's huge. It's loud. It's . . . it's . . .'

The reader was only half-listening. It . . . he . . . was Light. Flames, but not wavering or irregular. Electricity, sheet lightning, the Aurora Borealis. The reader thought of classical ballet: It . . . he . . . bore the same relationship to the sun, was similar, in the way that a bad caricature resembled the face

upon which it was modeled. Patterns. Amazing, complex, interwoven patterns swam across, within the globe shape. Now — now, just then, like a cell dividing. Two shapes, then four, then eight. But, unlike the 'four people changing places in a phone booth' quality of cell division, it was a dance, immaculate synchronised swimming, fluid legerdemain. Now, now — just then — like a kaleidoscope of interwoven faces, joy multiplying, replicating, then consolidating into a single face which . . . the reader laughed and the clownish face was gone. Arcs of light stretched across to one another, clasping like perfect hands rendered by an otherworldly Leonardo, dissolving into . . .

Viktor Davis was still talking, still . . . nattering. The reader felt a sense of irritation. Be quiet, the reader wanted to say. I'm *Looking*. I'm *LOOKING!* You're spoiling it. Just let me . . . look.

'Compelling,' Viktor Davis said. 'Although the comparison with Niagara Falls is woefully inadequate, he shares many of the same traits. It is one of those inescapable facts of nature that an entity contemplating the sublime is going to feel an irresistible urge to form a connection with it of some kind. Put another way, what do you *do* with Niagara Falls? I mean, it's magnificent, okay. It's a marvel, sure. It's virtually without compare, a natural wonder, granted. But — but — it's just SITTING THERE! I have to be . . . *with* it. I have to . . . *attach* it to me . . . or . . . or . . .

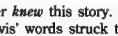
'String a rope across it and do a tightrope act. Fly over it in an airplane. Go over it in a barrel. Build a hotel next to it. Or an amusement park. Or sell tickets on a boat that goes right up to it.

Harness it.'

The reader felt the reader's mind begin to split.

Exception.

Consensus.



The reader *knew* this story. (*Huh?*) Even as Viktor Davis' words struck the reader's ear, buzzing, insistent, annoying, like a large, lazy housefly, the reader felt a sinking feeling in the pit of the reader's stomach. (*Sinking feeling? What sinking feeling?*) It . . . *he* . . . was still right there. (*Yeah. yeah. What about it?*) Just as . . . magnificent. Just as . . . awe-inspiring, but Viktor Davis' words had changed something. (*They had?*) Foreboding. (*Confusion.*) The reader felt a sense of foreboding and then . . . denial. (*Denial?*) The reader would not . . . could not . . . face the implications. No. It didn't happen that way. (*What? What didn't happen?*) It couldn't happen that way. Never mind. He's right. Don't Read This. But I can't stop. I can't . . . help myself. Just look. Don't listen anymore. Just look. Don't think about it. (*Don't think about WHAT? What are you talking about?*) If you think about it, it will happen and it . . . couldn't mustn't . . . happen. The reader began to shudder uncontrollably. (*What the hell is wrong with you?*) Any second now Viktor Davis was going to start talking again. Viktor Davis was going to . . . say things. Things that weren't true.

All stories are true.

Shut up. Shut up, the reader screamed. It had been said with Viktor Davis' voice and simultaneously given voice to in the reader's own mind (*the reader's own mind*). And an image. An image of the known universe, the satellite globes surrounding that . . . swollen . . . red . . . giant red . . . like . . . (*WHAT?*) . . . like . . . (*WHAT? LIKE WHAT?!*)

NO!

The reader's eyes closed; the reader's eyes closed to shut out that terrible picture, to wipe away that hideous picture of . . . of . . . what the reader didn't want to think about.

Of course, closed eyes only made it worse. *That* image was in the reader's mind. Closed eyes only made the hideous picture more real. The reader's eyes snapped open and it . . . he . . . was there again. Even more perfect (it seemed to the reader) than before. Even more magnificent (it seemed) than before.

There was a . . . new quality to it. (*There was?*) So easy . . . so easy to overlook. All that . . . energy. Awe-inspiring. Dwarfing the reader. Filling the reader with unfelt emotions. Exalted emotions. But now . . . now the reader could see. Now the reader couldn't help but see. (*Well, you'd better tell me, because I don't see anything that's . . .*) It . . .

He.

Was vulnerable. (*Vulnerable?*)

'Once we entered our . . . *modern* . . . age,' said Viktor Davis quietly, 'our age of technological marvels, a number of plans were put forward as to what to . . . *do* . . . with Niagara Falls. All of this stuff about Niagara Falls, by the way, I got from an amazing book called *Niagara* by Pierre Berton. Credit where it's due and all that.

The plan I found the most interesting was Metropolis, a planned super-city. Gleaming towers up to the sky, very similar to the Fritz Lang movie of the same name. It would house most of the population of North America in a single structure. It would be built overtop of Niagara Falls. Not next to the Falls, you understand. Overtop of the Falls. The city would be powered by the Falls, which would be confined to the basement — the furnace room, if you will. The furnace room, of course, would be off-limits to the general public. I have no doubt that they had some plan for sound-proofing as well, lest that annoying roar disturb the good citizens of Metropolis.'

The reader slumped forward.

The reader would have given anything, just seconds before, if Viktor Davis would have just stopped . . . talking. Anything. Now the reader found that the silence was not an improvement. Not by a long shot. The silence, in many ways, just sitting, sitting and staring at . . . him . . . was worse. Rage, mixed with loathing, welled up within the reader. It felt as if some vital part of the reader wanted to tear itself out of the reader's body and go to . . . him, to form some kind of a living shield.

DAMN YOU! screamed the reader.

DAMN YOU! WHY CAN'T YOU JUST

LEAVE HIM . . . *ALONE!*

The reader wanted to
(hide him)

The reader wanted to
(put up a barricade around him)

The reader wanted to . . .

The rage subsided. It was replaced by an awful, overwhelming sense of futility. Impotence. Hide him. Put up a barricade around him.

'It really amounts to the same thing, doesn't it?' asked Viktor Davis, quietly, sympathetically.

The reader stared straight ahead at it . . . him.

Several long moments passed.

The reader nodded.

More time passed.

'You okay?' asked Viktor Davis.

Well, no. I don't understand what all this . . .

'I wasn't talking to you,' snapped the author.

The reader bristled at this, considered a number of appropriate rejoinders about having followed Cerebus *for this long and what right did Viktor Davis have to . . . The reader thought about a sack of gold and a handful of silver coins. This was the thing the reader hated about* Cerebus. *Grudgingly, sulkily, the reader stayed quiet.*

The reader and Viktor Davis were, again, side by side in the vast, empty stadium. It was even colder now. It felt as if it might snow any minute.

'Define *okay*,' said the reader.

Victor Davis smiled, briefly.

'There're only two more parts to go,' he said.

'Do you really think it's true . . .' began the reader and then turned away sharply, visibly annoyed. 'All right, all right. I know your answer.'

'But . . . why?' the reader asked.

'Because I think it's time,' said Viktor Davis. 'Besides, I'm a storyteller. I think it's an effective story. I think it . . . explains a lot.'

The reader thought about this for a time. And then nodded, glumly.

'Can I have one of your cigarettes?'

'Only if you already smoke,' said Viktor Davis.

Large, wet snowflakes began falling all around them.

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dave and Aardvark Commentators,

Let me establish my *Cerebus* credentials before I truly begin. I was introduced to *Cerebus* through an ex-boyfriend of mine (who will be shocked or at least amused by my letter, since I know he still reads *Cerebus*). He, along with two of our friends, loved *Cerebus* and I didn't understand why. They sung the praises of *Cerebus* until I wanted to shove the filthy book down their throats. I picked it up once, and was immediately disgusted by what I thought was a cliché-ridden piece of garbage. *Cerebus* reminded me of Arnold's *Conan the Destroyer*, an uncouth, loud-mouthed barbarian type constantly frustrating the supporting characters. But this ex (whom I loved and respected despite *Cerebus*) insisted that I read the story from the beginning. I picked up *Swords* #1 and slowly converted to the *Cerebus* movement (mainly because of your Notes from the President, Dave). *Mothers and Daughters* was just beginning, and so was my collection. I've moved since the big BURN that marked the end of our love affair, but I couldn't spurn *Cerebus* just because HE introduced us. That would have been childish and obsessive of me to discredit the things I'd learned or picked up from him simply because he no longer loved me.

Which brings me to the reason I finally wrote to the Aardvark Comment. I am disgusted with the various cry-baby letters in the Aardvark Comment from men who've been burned and spurned by different women. I am sick to death of the "woe is me" crap that's being flung all over the place. In my mind, the situation is simple: if a chick says "yes" and then says "no" (directly or indirectly), then blow the bitch off!!! If she's so flaky to begin with, why get your balls tied in a knot? The chick is obviously of inferior breeding and should be culled. Why tear your heart out over such an inferior piece of workmanship? Separate the wheat from the chaff and get on with your life! I'd rather masturbate than fuck some wishy-washy bloated meat sac — and I'm a woman!!!!!

Doesn't anybody bother with **character** anymore when searching for a potential fuck or mate? Character, or rather, integrity is one of the most important aspects of a person. Why do you think Jaka is one of the most favored of all the *Cerebus* characters? I think it is because Jaka has integrity. Quoting Dave's Note from the President in *Cerebus* #114:

"She embodies those qualities I always look for in a woman. She has a very simple way of thinking, for which she is unapologetic. She's loaded with common sense and self-confidence She is direct and has a low threshold for bullshit. She has virtually no interest in material possessions, though she has an appreciation of them."

Jaka displayed integrity when she returned Cerebus' sword, remained with Rick despite her love for Cerebus, and even when she aborted her fetus (she knew better than to breed with Rick). Jaka's refusal to submit to the Cirinists' views on stripping that would have ended her confinement reeks of integrity. Integrity is Jaka's appeal as a character in *Cerebus*, and it is not unlike the integrity of Jean Auel's character Ayla in *Clan of the Cave Bear*, or Edmund Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac. Where is the integrity of bemoaning your fate just because some chick hasn't the integrity to say "no" the first time? Is every one of you so desperate for love and sex that you'll descend to whatever depths it takes to have it? Maybe the chick wasn't so flaky to reject you guys, after all the cry-baby letters I've read. Who wants a mate with no integrity?

With barely a glimmer of sympathy,

Steph Green
— the Misplaced Midwesterner

P.S. Greetings, Yason Yensen — burned any milk trucks lately?

Who wants a mate, period? Put your hands down; I was talking about me.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

About the only thing I can imagine as being worse than being sick (outside of being dead) is being constantly sick. The first couple of days you deny that you are sick. Thinking that it's just a temporary thing, you go about your daily business, a little slower, a little less complete, looking just a little out of it. That's when people start to ask if you're feeling all right. At this point, you feel like crap, so you accept it and start playing for sympathy. Then, when you accept it, you feel worse, tired, bored, restless, that sort of thing. You can't seem to find anything to do. If you're jerk enough to go out and risk other people getting sick, that's something. But, like most people, I usually choose not to. So I sit around all day. Actually, I walk around the house, room to room, upstairs, downstairs and back again. Over and over and over. Maybe this time something will jump out and grab my attention. But if anything does, it doesn't even hold your attention. The last time I was sick, I watched the first twenty minutes of *Star Wars* before getting bored with that. I did this about four or five times At least today I did something. Having purchased *Cerebus*: *High Society* yesterday, I sat down for a bit to read some before I got bored again. When I looked up, it was 2:00, three hours after I had started and I was done. I was that into it. I read all 500 pages in three hours, and my interest never waned. That is an amazing thing, sick or not. I can only hope that the other books about Cerebus are as engrossing. Thank you for making a sick person feel better.

—DT

Glad you enjoyed it.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

I *really* need a word processor.

My introduction to your life's work is probably as uninteresting and common as any you've ever heard. Briefly: As a single digit I inhaled *Archie* and *Richie Rich's* like cocaine. (Q: Is Casper really the friendly ghost of Richie Rich after frying to death in a fiery limousine crash with a drunk Cadbury at the wheel?) As an early teen I read the spider-books and *X-Men*. I subscribed to these in order to get the "four free issues" and rarely entered the local comics shop (then called the Comic Vault). I also loved the hardbound collections my dad had of the 1950s EC trio of horror comics. I soon became disinterested in comics and found lots of other neat stuff to read. Fast-forward seven or eight years, sophomore year in college — beautiful housemate Erin (hello, darlin') hands me her brother's battered copy of *High Society* — I devour it, beg for her copies of the *Swords* books, and have been hooked since midway through *Church and State*. So much for briefly.

I really can't describe all the emotional states your brilliant work has brought upon me, so I won't try. I was glad to read that you couldn't care less about the opinions of Srin and Lon. I, for one, find your experiences with the comics industry integral to the book, be they on the letters page, in editorial form, speech transcripts, or in the text itself. Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke.

Recent events in my life have prompted me to finally take pen to paper and connect with you and your readers. Bear with me as I return to my single-digit years — you just have to appreciate the big picture here.

Okay. It's the mid-seventies, I'm somewhere between nine and eleven years old. My parents are best friends with another couple who had three daughters. The oldest daughter is five years older than me, but then it might as well have been twenty-five years as far as I was concerned. I had known this girl for as long as I could remember, and I knew even then that she was incredibly beautiful. Dark, olive skin, long black hair, a real heart-stopper. At some point that I can't clearly remember we developed a friendship that excluded the two younger daughters. Whenever my folks brought me over to their house, Jen and I would disappear up to her bedroom, lock the door and play for hours. We played board games, listened to records, read comics, and talked and talked. She was my best friend, and I loved her.

Soon our friendship took a strange (natural?) turn. We were playing connect four when one of us suggested (I *think* her) that we play *strip* connect four. I remember my entire body palpitating with pleasure and fear as I fiercely contemplated each move of that extended version of tic-tac-toe.

I lost something like five games straight and wound up in my underwear. Humiliated as I was, for some reason I kept playing. Miraculously I began to win — bless her heart, I'm pretty sure now that she was throwing the matches.

When she was naked for the first time, I nearly cried. God, I was in awe. The image is forever burned into my memory: that perfect body, fifteen years old, looked so soft, so warm, so beautiful. A mystery, the greatest mystery ever, revealed, and yet not revealed. I was ten years old, and so full of fear. Fear of being caught, getting in trouble. Fear that she would put her clothes back on and I would never see her naked again. Fear of being humiliated. I think I touched her breasts that day.

Over the course of the next few months, I saw a lot of Jen. We would still go upstairs, lock the door, and play, but the games became quite different. I remember one quite clearly that we played a lot. It was a fantasy where I played two parts, hero and villain, and she the maiden in distress. I would take her prisoner, then I would rescue her, and we would invariably wind up in bed together, celebrating the triumph of good over evil. I was never totally naked (she had no interest in my 1/2-inch weenie), though she usually was. The furthest it went was extended periods of my fondling, playing with, and even kissing her breasts. I never once felt abused, although I remember feeling some shame, as if we both knew what was happening was wrong. It never stopped me, though, and whenever I was with her it was heaven.

Soon the sexual experimentation stopped. We never talked about it to anyone. About a year later my parents divorced, as did Jen's. Over the course of that year Jen ran away from home, and I didn't see her again for ten years.

Plot twist: (Christ, none of you will believe me but I swear it's true) During my third year of high school my dad married Jen's mom. I spent a year and a half living with Jen's youngest sister, before I left home for college. Jen is now my stepsister.

Three years ago Jen returned to our home town, her irreconcilable differences with her mother reconciled. We have again become close friends.

Jen is thirty years old and unmarried. She never wants to marry. She however, desperately wants a child. She just asked me last night to donate sperm so she can have a baby. She wants me to father her child and have it remain a secret to everyone, including the child.

Dave, anonymous readers, I love this woman immensely. I don't know what to think or do. I would love to make love to her, but I'd even whack off into a turkey baster if she wanted me to. I know this isn't Dear Abby, but I am desperate for some reaction — and who else can I tell? I really think I would do anything for this woman, and the thought of having a child in the world that I can love, watch grow, and not be responsible for in any way is irresistible.

Your thoughts?

Well, as long as you know that the female-dominated judicial system will land on you with both feet if she changes her mind about child support and that you won't have a leg to stand on if she decides to move away and deny you access, knock yourself out, kid.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave, she dumped me. No, not a girlfriend, but my wife. And she took our daughter. Dave, I'm hurting bad — at this point this letter may well turn out to be a suicide note, I don't know. I don't have anyone to talk to, so, Dave, I'm sorry, but you're elected, man.

It all started two years ago. I was having no luck with women, didn't seem to have anything in common with them. Then the Pet Shop Boys fan club magazine dropped through the letterbox — several girls were on the pen pal page, I thought "why not write". So I wrote to a couple of them, both

more than 300 miles away from Brainbree, so no romantic intentions, right? Well, "from Manchester" had a really friendly style, and it transpired she was going to a party in a town not 14 miles away from me. Needless to say, I invited her to stay for the weekend, and we'd go see the sights of London, too. She agreed, then, one fateful day, a fortnight before the party, she called me at work. Her voice was just perfection itself. Over the next 14 days we spoke on the phone for 3 hours a night — no repetitious, hesitations; just sheer, unbridled talk (from both sides, too). Leading up to her visit, I sent her a countdown in red roses . . . I was in love.

She came down, we had a marvellous weekend, and I proposed at the end of it. She accepted, went back home, and moved in two weeks later. We set a wedding date for a few months in advance, and decided to try for a child straightaway. (Both sets of parents were a little shocked — she was 18, I was 22.)

No problems on the fertility front; she got pregnant quickly; we married and our beautiful baby girl was born. Soon after, it all began to go wrong. At the time, we were living with my brother and his wife and they had a baby two days after ours. The girls just griped at each other all the time — it was making Lucie so miserable that I chucked them out of my house at the end of August.

Then Lucie found out that 4 years ago I'd lent £3000 to my parents to prop up their ailing business. It collapsed shortly afterwards; they had not paid anything back.

To keep her happy, I demanded the money from my parents, who were bankrupt but still found a few quid to start paying me off. That wasn't fast enough for Lucie and she started to put the pressure on me. I balked, 'cos it didn't seem fair to push them harder, but she insisted, so, anything for a quiet life, I cut off contact until they paid up in full. Boxing Day 1993 — she packs her bags, throws the rings at me and says she's leaving. I break down totally and persuade her to stay for six weeks to see if we can sort things out. Six weeks come and go, things seem to be getting better, even start having sex again in March. Then we discover my parents have gone on holidays to the U.S. She goes mad, I'm confused, surely there is a reasonable explanation, she's appalled that I'm not out of my mind with anger, and says I'm making excuses for them. Things get worse, she starts to claim I'm just like my parents and will never change, that I've lied to her and that she doesn't trust me and no longer loves me.

She's decided to walk out and go back to her mum's, the day after our daughter's 1st birthday (next Thursday). She's taking the kid with her.

Goddammit, I love her, but she doesn't believe me. I stick with her through her darkest depressions and I'm treated like shit. I love my daughter, too — the thought of never seeing her again makes me vomit. How can I bear to look at her nursery, knowing she'll never be there again?

Dave, I want to die, I feel so bad. Would that be selfish of me? Is there any hope for the future? Why do women do this; are they all alike? What's the point in life — be born, grow up, work for a bit, die? Dave, I envy you — I hate my job, but need it to live. You love your hobby and get paid well for it, I feel like Cerebus — manipulated on all sides, in no way is he in control of his destiny, and I expect to die, alone, unloved and unmourned.

Dave, is this my issue #300 where I die at the end?

I don't know, I really don't know.

Craig R. Lemon
78 Mountbatten Road
Brainbree, Essex
CM7 6TP, England

I just rang Craig up and a chick answered and said he wasn't home yet. This was followed by one of those eardrum-piercing shrieks endemic to enlarged-out-of-body-female organs, so I guess things are okay. Just for the record, this was a Clrinist-Clrinist squeeze play; who owns Craig? His wife or his mother? Mom won this round, but it sounds like Lucie decided to go for best three out of five. My money's on the mother in the seventh round by a TKO.

★★★★★★★★★★

So I guess the main question is . . . What does it all mean? I think my mind is playing cruel tricks on me. Isn't that a joke? Your own mind working against you like that? I have many facts, some solid, some not so solid, but none of them add up. Try as I might, I can't make one bit of sense out of this. I'm tired. So tired. Everything's a mess. A big fucking mess. I hate that more than anything, I guess. It really bugs me when situations are a mess. I could easily (so I say) let it all go, of course. What could be the worst that would happen? I would regret. Regret. Hell, we do that every day. Not a day goes by when you don't regret something. When you think maybe you should've done something different. "Should have" is the key phrase here. It's past tense. Nothing you can do about it in the present. Maybe I could've done it better, been more mature about it, a lot more practical. But that doesn't work in these situations. You're not in your right mind at that point. Fact is, what were mistakes, bad calls or dimwitted things I did to further the situation — it doesn't matter now. Not one goddamned bit.

I won't call her ever again. I'll make that promise to myself; I hope I can live up to it. If she calls me, fine, that's beautiful. I guess. Point is, I'm through. Very through. I wash my hands of the situation. I've got to reach into my pockets and say "Yes, Jim, I am a man."

But here we go again. I still can't help but think of her and what she said, what she sounded like that night. She is truly, more than any other girl I've met, a mystery to me. Her intentions are so shrouded I don't think she even knows what they are. That pisses me off. I am not going to take it anymore. Screw her. I'm really beginning to think she's not even worth one minute of my conscious time. She has nothing interesting to offer me. When it comes down to it, when I strip away all of the mind-game bullshit, she is a boring person. I can see that now. It makes me glad to finally see it, but at the same time it troubles me. It's like seeing the great OZ. A thing once thought to be so beautiful and wondrous, brought down to a very common image. Beautiful still, yes, but only to some other blind man than me. I'm seeing with clear eyes. It's sobering. Reality always carries a lot of baggage.

It's time to move on. Move forward: it's the only direction I can go in now. Whatever happens, whatever she says from this point on, doesn't matter. I can't let myself get confused.

Why do we do it? What's the point? It never works. We try and try, but we come out empty-handed and sometimes with less than we started with. Still though, we keep jumping off that cliff like those stupid lemmings. Unfortunately we're even more stupid than those lemmings, because we climb back up, ponderously, and leap off happily again. We must, deep down, really enjoy our suffering. Then again, what's life without suffering — it's what lets us know we're alive. Just keep telling yourself there's a light at the end of the tunnel. It's that self-deception that keeps us all going.

Jim McVey
430 Walnut Creek, Apt. #2106
Lisle, Illinois
USA 60532

Hey. Speak for yourself.

★★★★★★★★★★

Oh, Mr. Siiiiim . . .

Hi, Dave, what are you doing? You're eating cheese, aren't you? I knew it. We all did. Who are "we"? I forget. Calvin, do you know? Of course not. You're a figment of my imagination. I forgot. Where's Rupert? Oh, yeah, he's off in search of a llama. L l a m m a l l a m m a l l a m m a llammallamma. TOOT! TOOT!! And where is Fred Gwinne? You know, from issue #124? Why hasn't he written more letters? I know, he's dead. That never stopped him before. He'll be back! He'll be back! He HAS TO! HE WAS THE LIVING FIVE-POUND BLOCK OF CHEESE, DAMMIT!

Then the valium kicks in. Valium. Morphine. Prozac. I'm becoming a regular pharmaceutical, aren't I, Dave? TOOT! TOOT! (redux) And where in the world is Carmen Sandiego? I don't know. I looked *everywhere.* Except Seattle. I fear Seattle. Don't you? That's funny, an artichoke calling my name. Artichoke. Artichoke. Artichoke. BOING! Canadaa . . . Canadaa . . . Hey, I'm a letterhack now. WHOO-HOO! TOP O' THE PAGE, MA! Sorry about that. No, I'm not. I'm proud! Proud, do you hear?!! I AM THE WAFFLE KING! Time for a deep, probing question. Why, Dave, why? Why? WHY? Why is there Jell-O? Why isn't your hair green? Why isn't Gerhard purple? Why ask why? Try Bud Dry. Why, Dave? Why? Why? WHY?!!!

Then the valium kicks in again. Whoops. Passin' out. Hallucinating. Mr. Heidrych, that's not your moose. We're all walnuts, I can feel it. Look, an elephant. Wombat, WHAM! ZZZZZZZZ ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ ZZZZZZZZZ . . .

(Elapse 5 hours.)

I'm conscious again, Dave. WOOOOO! One more thing. We're all around you, Dave, and our numbers are growing. Why, we may have five by the end of the year. Boy, this letter is long. I can make it as long as I want, Dave. Dum-dee-dum-dum. La-la-la-la-la-la-la.

I'm sick of "la", Dave. "La" is against me. Rupert, have you found that llama yet? I think I'm ready to shut up now.

Edward Peterson, a.k.a. The man in the moon, a.k.a. Public Egg Roll number one, a.k.a. The blue cheese man, a.k.a. The guy who did this entire letter stoned, a.k.a. The man who made prolific use of the phrase "a.k.a.", a federal offense in 49 states including Puerto Rico.

441B W. Grant Place
Chicago, Illinois
USA 60614

P.S. Eggs don't bounce.

Y'daffy bastid.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

So, the aardvark has a vagina, along with his penis. Oh, how original. You're such a hack. The same thing happened a few months ago in *Captain America.*

D.E. Smith
9 UNCG Station
Greensboro, NC
USA 27413-1001

P.S. I was recently thinking about how odd the comic-book industry is, especially when it comes to the celebrity-like treatment given to its top "talent." Sometimes I'll read about how much money a Todd McFarlane makes, or how many letters an Erik Larson receives, or how long fans wait in line to meet a John Byrne, a Frank Miller, or even a Dave Sim, and it just makes me laugh, because in the real world, all you guys ain't shit.

McFarlane could walk into a comics convention, and he would be mobbed by thousands of people (if it was a large convention), but in a grocery store, no one would care if he's Todd McFarlane, the artist of *Spawn,* or the Queen of Egypt.

And why do you suppose I've been thinking about this? It's of course the recent death of Jack Kirby. Here we have a man, considered the most important and influential person in the history of comic books, considered the best ever, the creative genius behind the most popular characters and concepts in all of comicbookdom, the "KING" of comics. And did his death send shockwaves across the country? I think not. And just where did I learn about this man's death: the television news, a story in the newspaper? No. I learned about Kirby's death from a joke on *Saturday Night Live* (it was something like "Jack Kirby, creator of popular comic-book characters like the Hulk and Captain America, died this week. However, plans have been announced to bring him back in a future issue" — a joke that seemed to go over the heads of the unlaughing studio audience).

Anyway, the point I'm getting at is — that even though mountains of praise and adoration were heaped upon Jack Kirby from the comic-book industry, in reality, he wasn't shit, and neither are you.

P.P.S. I hope I'm not sucking up too much, am I?

Not at all. Actually, I think this is the hidden strength of the comic-book field. You left the quotes off 'real' world, but you're quite right. We ain't shit. Who would want to be? Put your hands down; I was talking about me.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Two recent letters from readers voiced criticism of *Mothers and Daughters.* Until I read those letters, I was generally convinced that I was the only reader who felt a significant disappointment with the current story line. Also I thought that any criticism, however well-expressed or well-intentioned, would fail to affect in any way your perception of your work and would therefore be useless. In other words, if my criticism would have no effect, what would be the point in voicing it at all? Although I might, as people will do, say things occasionally out of whim, I do not criticize others for the sake of hearing myself speak or out of the desire to denigrate someone else.

I am not going to enter into a protracted discussion of what I

think is right and wrong with *Cerebus*. I will say that overall the book has improved lately, although I must agree with Lon Levy in that the Victor Reid story seems to digress unnecessarily. For my part, I was waiting to see what turns the story took and to see if it improved further. Having, as many other readers have, invested a not insignificant sum of pocket money in collecting *Cerebus*, it seems a shame to abruptly lose faith and abandon something I have spent a fair amount of time with. Certainly, having spent about sixteen years creating *Cerebus* and investing a more than fair amount of time and money in the production of it, you understand that sort of attachment to an even greater degree, I'm sure.

However, beyond the faltering quality of work, there is something else that seems disturbing. In response to Lon Levy's letter, you suggested that it took a lot of nerve for him to tell you what he thought should "come out" of *Cerebus*. But I don't think so. For the past sixteen years, you've printed a letters column in *Cerebus*, presumably for the main purpose (although clearly not exclusively; my own letters are evidence of this) of commenting on the work you produce. Since you clearly understood that people would comment upon the story, does your response to Levy's letter indicate that you are not prepared for comments that are explicitly critical or negative? Although not all letters of criticism say so outright, it should be clear that if someone thinks a particular part is not good, then they must also believe that that particular part should be altered or removed So anyone who makes criticism of some thing is implicitly suggesting that it should be altered or removed.

My question to you is this: Is it all negative criticisms that you object to or only those that you are made aware of?

How much nerve does it take to open a letters forum and then become indignant (. . . do you really think I'm going to let you decide [?]) when someone says they are unsatisfied? How much nerve does it take to publish a letter and then spend a full paragraph telling everyone that you don't care what the letter has to say? How much nerve does it take to equate a critical letter with an editor or a publisher or someone making your decisions for you?

The mere fact that you felt it necessary to inform your readers that they could not force you to make certain decisions would seem to suggest that you think all of your readers are morons.

I do wish you well in future promotion of *Cerebus* and I hope that the story improves as well. In the meantime, though, a little class wouldn't hurt.

Sincerely,

John Wright
8433 Chase Rd.
Louisville, KY
USA 40258

Okay, picture this. I buy a plane ticket to Louisville. I jump in a cab and tell the driver to take me to 8433 Chase Road. I knock on your door. You're very surprised to see me. I walk in and start telling you what's wrong with the decor of your house. When you try to tell me that it's none of my business, I explain to you how much it cost me to fly to Louisville, how much time it's taken out of my schedule and that that entitles me to criticize your taste. How would you feel? I would imagine that you would tell me, either nicely or otherwise, to go fuck myself. I think you would be right to do so.

★★★★★★★★★★

Look, Dave, I'm getting very confused. Actually, screw the "getting" — I just am confused. Every month, I get my *Cerebus* and read it cover to cover, and along the way I get your view of sexuality. This confuses me because it is so alien to me, yet makes such sense to me that I feel I badly need to accept it on some fundamental level. You see, I am one of the ghastly generation of feminised lads — raised to consider lust as impardonable lechery; to see women with total respect, approach them with total consideration; to win (Look — no inverted commas! That's a triumph for me!) their love through playing a torturous Lancelot role. And it gets me fucking nowhere! No Guineveres pining away for me, I'm afraid. I'm 22 years old and still a virgin. I hasten to point out that my looks aren't really the issue here — it's just my attitude to women that somewhere along the line either puts them off or freezes me up. I keep telling myself to accept the Dave Sim sexual crash course of relaxation and carefree-dom, but somehow I just don't. And I'm starting to feel genuinely scared that an old dog cannot be taught new tricks. This sort of paranoia does me no favours, I'm telling you.

And another thing! (foam, gnash, rant) How the fuck do you get OUT of a fan club? Once you're relegated there, how do you convince your enamorata that actually you'd rather not see her if you can't fuck her? What sort of a person does that make me, anyway? And even worse — Oh, sin of sins! — I would dearly love to punch the lights out from women who so revel in the presence of their admiring — but never laid — throngs. Same for men, actually, although it seems to be a rarer condition for them. How can people treat each other so shabbily? Am I the only person who considers sex, love and morality to have ANYTHING to do with each other? And why does this state of mind preclude me from getting fucked? Maybe women find this attitude repellent, or boring, but I can't see such a sweeping generalisation being accurate.

Actually, rereading this, I find that "punch the lights out" bit pretty self-contradictory. Told you I'm confused. But there are so many sexually unfulfilled people out there, and for them — or should I say us? — there is no justice or peace of mind. The road to hell is paved with one-way love affairs! And no sex.

For me, and I'm probably belabouring the point now, but, shit, this is therapeutic — the world is increasingly dividing into two groups: the sexually satisfied and the sexually unsatisfied. The former I bitterly resent, and the latter I feel empathic contempt for. What a lousy world view! But the question that this quandary brands onto my lobes is: to what extent is unsatisfaction your own fault? I'm increasingly of the opinion that I, and many other feminised men, am terminally deficient in some nebulous respect.

OK — enough self-pity. I needed to do this, though. There's a lot more I could write, and I will if this interests you. I would certainly be interested to hear your prescription. Sorry for the rampant neurosis — I'm usually chirpier, but then again, I find chirpiness pretty bland and trite after a while. Lest I forget — you and Ger keep up the good work. I'll send you my one-page debunk of Nietzsche if it comes out OK — comics

form, of course. Another bitter rant from the house of bitter rants! Toodle pip!

Ian Beggs
2 Digby Street
Bethnal Green
London E2

Well, obviously I can't 'deprogram' someone just like that. Shit, it's taken me years just to deprogram myself. The first step is to figure out what you want. If you just want to fuck every good-looking chick you see and have them go away after, then you have to be that way. They don't care what you want; why should you care what they want? Stop asking yourself what you 'should' do and start asking yourself what you 'want' to do. I haven't gotten laid in (what is it now?) four months. But I know for a fact that I just want to fuck every good-looking girl I see and have them go away after. I'm not kidding myself that I want a caring, sharing, nurturing relationship between equals. If that *is* what you want, just hang fire for a while. One of them will be along to gobble you up any minute now. Trust me.

★★★★★★★★★★

Hey, Dave,

I've been back from the Mid-Ohio Con at its new digs in Columbus for a while now and I truly owe you a thank-you for making the Con an extremely enjoyable one. Sorry for the delay. I've just read *Cerebus* #180 — First Blood — and I come to the Aardvark Comment and fall upon a letter from some moron who had also attended the Con, bashing John Byrne and praising you for the approach to autographing and contact with his adoring public. How very objective of you to sum it up as different strokes for different folks, but I'd like to go one better in defense of John. This is not a paid-for endorsement; I'd just like to let the gentle reader understand the other side to this coin since I'm sure many stood up and agreed with the writer. Mr. Brandt wasn't there perhaps standing in line to see John, have some books signed, shoot the breeze, or compliment him on his current or past successes, so he probably didn't see John give a comp issue of *Next Men* to a young fan because he simply couldn't find it. Nor did he, I suspect, hear him defend his limitations on autographs to another so-called fan as being a way of prohibiting dealers from taking advantage of his time and also allowing him to gain contact with as many fans as possible during the con (or something to that effect). Now, let's focus on the issue of sketches when he wants and what he wants to do . . . the Mid-Ohio Con is based around a very important focus: a charitable cause known as the Ronald McDonald Children's Charity Funds. The proceeds John gets from a piece he auctions off go directly to this charity. As for the $1.00 duplicate autograph fee, that too was a charitable contribution (adopted by several of the guest artists. Mr. Brandt, were they also "copping an attitude"??). This yearly convention is Roger Price's *baby*. John is a very close personal friend of Roger's. What John does is support Roger in any way possible to assure the success of this con. Nothing more, nothing less. If it was your friend, you'd do the same. John has been a key role player in the attraction to this con. He's got an attitude, but how you interpret it is not the absolute law. Mr. Brandt, I think you owe Mr. Byrne an apology. You do a disservice to potential con-goers by planting negative vibes in their perception of what this con can be like. Please, Mr. Brandt, if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all . . . and stop trying to pit the artists against each other. It's not going to work. In my heart I believe there is a strong support system in this field that exists between artists and the goals that many work towards — quality art, provocative story-telling, challenging the First Amendment, and getting the reader involved and moved to think for themselves.

Respectfully,

Lisa Beaderstadt
100 N. Mason #305
Bensenville, IL
USA 60106

cc: Hal Brandt
John Byrne
Roger Price

P.S. Go Sox!

How you interpret John Byrne's attitude (or lack thereof) isn't absolute law either, Lisa. Lisa, for those who don't know, is the wife of Scott Beaderstadt, co-creator of those wonderful 'black-and-white implosion casualties', *the Trollords*, which I have every confidence will be back stronger than ever, before too much longer. Scott, I want your wife, reeal bad.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Belated thanks for your personal phone message regarding my comics story "What Is Life?" Even though you were turning *down* the sucker, I really appreciated the personal attention. I certainly wasn't expecting any.

I'm enclosing my latest issue of *Naked Eye*, featuring "Manta Ray Country" — my first long, personal, tragicomic tale. Hope you enjoy it. I'll definitely keep you on the mailing list and will be immensely honored should you ever notice anything worthy of "*Cerebus Preview*" attention.

Add me to the list. (Sorry this isn't a postcard . . .) I picked up *Cerebus* #1 at The Bookie Parlor in Dayton, Ohio in 1978 and have been with you since. I remember having the following conversation with a friend:

He — What is it? A rip-off of *Howard the Duck?*

Me — No. More like a rip-off of *Conan!*

I was heavily into both *Howard the Duck* and *Conan* at the time, so your marketing strategy worked beautifully . . .

S.A. King
1333 W. Estes, Apt. #16
Chicago, IL
USA 60626

For copies of King's *Naked Eye*, send oodles and boodles of money to 1333 W. Estes, Apt. 16, Chicago 60626.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave and gang,

It really annoys me when I see the following words at the beginning of a letter to a comic book: This is the first time I have ever written to a comic book.

Alas, in my case it is true, though in many ways I don't consider *Cerebus* a comic book. *Cerebus* as a whole is ranked up there with what I consider many of the literary greats. The word "literary" also annoys me. Anyway, on my bookshelves *Cerebus* is ranked with Homer's *Iliad*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, James Dickey's *Deliverance*, Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth* and five or six others that are supposedly big, serious works. I know, I know. Many readers are going to think, "*Moby Dick?* Are you shitting me? I read that crap in high school and it was the driest, most fluffed-up piece of crap ever!" I disagree.

Sure, there are long chapters about whaling and the color white. But I believe as a whole *Moby Dick* is an extremely important work on several different layers. If you don't agree with me then you just don't see the same things in the book that I do. It happens.

I really didn't mean for this letter to go on like this. I hadn't planned to write about *Moby Dick*. Besides, I don't want to sound like some literary prude. I like to read just for enjoyment also. I think *Cerebus*, the title, has a good mix; there is comedy to be found as well as high-fallutin' stuff.

Thanks a lot for the autograph and artwork at the Mid-Ohio Con. I live about an hour south of Columbus and when I first heard you would be at the convention, I knew I had to go. It was the first time I had ever been to a comics convention and it was definitely different. Though I buy three or four comics a month, I really don't consider myself a fanboy or even a comics reader. Most of what I buy I consider above most other comics (I don't mean this to sound degrading to anyone, I just don't care for superhero comics). I pick up *Cerebus*, *Sandman* and *Hellblazer* automatically. Occasionally I will try something new if it looks a bit different. I would like to start buying *Bone*, but my local dealer (Hi, Jerry!) doesn't carry it yet. Don't get down on him. I finally talked him into carrying *Cerebus* a few months ago, and his store has only been open a year or so. Now if I can just convince him to order the telephone books too!

At the con I was sort of disgusted with all the kids who were carrying stacks and stacks of *Spawn* #10 and nothing else. But on second thought, they are just kids. On third thought, it can't hurt if they at least have a vague idea of *Cerebus*. On fourth thought, who the hell am I to say what someone else's tastes in comics should be. And on fifth thought, I've got a copy of *Spawn* #10 at home. So who am I to talk?

Now, about these letters from Lon Levy and Srinivasan Sethuraman in #180. SCREW YOU GUYS!!! Sorry to put it that way, but that's how I feel. I will agree to a certain degree that I'm not real crazy about the prose sections in *Reads*. Not that I found them boring, quite the contrary. The story of Victor is interesting to me and told very well. I do think the prose can interfere with the other story line sometimes (if you can say it is another story line; they are connected in obvious ways). But that doesn't mean I'm going to quit reading *Cerebus* and it sure as hell doesn't mean that *Mothers & Daughters* is the worst story line so far. On the contrary, *Mothers & Daughters* may well be the best story line by the fact that the events portrayed are possibly the most important to happen to these characters up to this point. Well, possibly with the exception of the ending to *Church & State*. I mean, come on, look at all that has happened. Cerebus is not a male (or a female, for that matter)! The meeting between the three (actually four, if you count Po)! Cerebus and Cirin go at it one on one! And the end of, I say, the end of Elrod (though you have killed this guy before)! What more could you want? If all that's not enough to keep you interested in *Cerebus*, then go off and read . . . oh, I don't know, read the back of one of those barf bags you find on an airplane (it's all I could think of).

Okay, I feel better now. Though I'm sure I'll be getting hate mail from someone over this.

No, I think I'll rant and rave a little more. THANK GOD SOMEONE IS SELF-PUBLISHING!!! Lon Levy was right in saying that many artists don't want to deal with the headaches of the publishing business. Fine. Let those artists throw away their work and time and receive less money and satisfaction while doing so. What has happened in the comics business is the same that has happened in most of the publishing industry as a whole (I work at a newspaper so I have seen this). Big corporations have taken over everything and they want to control every little aspect of their employees' lives. The companies would never admit to this. The guys at the top of the ladder may not even feel this way. Still, the corporations are running everything this way. If you work for one of these big companies, then your life must revolve around them to a very large extent. Usually you have to pack up and move for a job. Don't tell me it isn't so. And not that moving is always a bad thing. I like to move every couple of years. I don't like being too settled. But there are many people who don't want to move because of family and friends (yeah, you're right, I don't have too many of either). Also, if you happen to disagree with a policy or the attitude of the company you work for, then you have to keep your mouth shut. Say just one wrong word at one wrong time and you could end up looking for another job. What George Orwell wrote in *1984* has happened, folks. Maybe not to the degree Orwell wrote of, but it has still happened. Corporations want to rule your life. You are expected to give up time, energy, companionship and anything else for them. Even your way of thinking.

I don't know. People just keep telling me I have a bad attitude. Maybe that's it. But, Dave, keep on rebelling. There may be no war to fight. But if there is, rebel. Even if there is not chance to win, rebel. Until these damn companies realize they have humans working for them, rebel. Someday I hope to be among the rebels, but for now . . .

Now I'm done ranting and raving.

On another note. Karl J. Hiller. Yes, you, the guy from Cincinnati. Cincy and Columbus aren't that far apart, man. Drive up there on the weekends. Hell, write me and maybe I could give you a ride up there some time if you don't have a car or something. If nothing else, the *Monkey's Retreat* is a cool shop. And maybe you'll run into that young lady again. Who knows?

In closing, thanks for everything, Dave. And you too, Gerhard. I'll write again after a few more issues. I'll wait and see if this one gets printed first. Even if it doesn't, I'll still write. This has been entertaining for myself, if no one else.

Tyrone Johnston
1911 Western Ave.
Apt. 11F
Chillicothe, OH
USA 45601-1051

P.S. CJ, I know you'll probably never see this (women don't read comics, right?), but I love you. Thanks for the last year.

P.P.S. Dave, sorry I got sappy with the postscript.

Oh, there's a war to fight all right, Tyrone. You've put your finger on one very big part of it. They'll destroy us in the end (they always do), but that doesn't take the fun out of fighting, does it?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

To the uninitiated ear, jazz is an unorganized jumble of sound going nowhere in particular, doing what it pleases. This, of course, is wrong. There is a universal rod of time running through it (a very good bass player I play with made me realize that one day), which is why there are such things as improvisation and seemingly random wandering on any given instrument. In the latest issue (181), it occurred to me that *Cerebus* the novel *is* exactly like this. There is a wonderful rod of time running through it, and the writer is *not* afraid to wander off the path, change time, stop time, improvise and solo with confidence. Good jazz writing is hard to find. That's the truth. I think what I like best is the song is far from over!

Thanks,

1/2 the rhythm section of the "Dirty Shirts"

Scottie Rotten, ladies and gentlemen, the drummer in Gerhard's band. Or, as Gerhard explained to me once, Ger's the bass player in Scottie's band. Dig a pony.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

It was, I believe, Laurie Anderson who said, "Writing about *music* is like dancing about architecture." One of my all-time favorite quotations, so I thought I'd set the record straight.

It was actually another one of your replies in issue #180 that got me started on this letter. In reply to N. McNimbus's letter about mixing women and comics, you replied that romance novels were "Very scary shit". Indeed. My first attempt to induct a non-comics-reading female into the world of comics consisted of a trade; she read the first fifty issues of *Cerebus* (letters columns optional), I read two romance novels of her choice.

I'm not a difficult person to entertain, so this wasn't a huge sacrifice on my part. As I'm reading through the first novel, I'm thinking this is a little frightening. As I'm finishing out the second one *(The Wolf and the Dove* by Kathleen Woodwiss — strange what sticks in your head after a decade), I'm deeply frightened. The underlying structure of both of these novels is basically as follows:

- boy meets girl by invading her homeland/castle.
- boy rapes girl and then goes casually about his conquering business.
- girl HATES boy for conquering her homeland/castle and for taking her by force.
- yet girl also has this uncontrollable DESIRE for boy, despite all this.
- boy may or may not rape her several more times before finally realizing that even though she is the enemy/a savage/the offspring of his vanquished enemy, she is still his one true love.
- at which time the woman rejoices and stands by her man (killer of her fellow countrypersons) and makes many strong babies.

What's wrong with this picture?

I suppose that if I argue that these novels can influence a reader's thinking on real-world issues such as equality in relationships and the women's movement, then I would have to accept a similar argument with regard to superhero comics and men's propensity to violence. Since I am loath to do this, I won't. I can say with certainty, however, that my relationship with this woman didn't last, and she hated the *Cerebus* comics.

All of which leaves us with the final problem of what to tell the creator about his work-in-progress. I'm a pretty devoted fan; once I've taken a liking to something I'm along for the ride. I confess I was not impressed with either *Jaka's Story* or *Melmoth* during the telling. But I have proof of Dave Sim's ability as a storyteller, so I assume there is a point and if I wait patiently I will be rewarded. Both of those story lines delivered by the end. I happen to find *Mothers and Daughters* a much more enjoyable ride, but obviously (at least) two other readers don't. The point is: how can you tell from here? And isn't there ample reason to trust? Ah, well.

There are a few people in my experience who have earned my undivided attention when they speak. Whether I agree or not, I know they will say something thoughtful. Occasionally they will say something profound. A classic example is Todd Rundgren (a musician long overdue for a mention in Aardvark Comment). Anyone who is a fan will know what I mean. While I'm never sure what he is likely to do or say next, I know from past experience that I want to be there when it happens. The man is a genius. In my estimation so are you. A chapter (or story arc) at a time, you are creating a work of genius with *Cerebus*. Like I said, I just want to be along for the ride.

A final thank-you and then I'll go. I am not a comics creator; I am a comics consumer. Therefore, other than the extent to which it allows me to get my hands on more good comics, the Great Publishing Debate doesn't concern me much. I have nevertheless read all your ruminations on this topic with a consuming and very personal interest. The underlying themes I find in your self-publishing editorials are commitment to your art, excellence in what you create, and control over your finished product and your livelihood.

Even though I do not expect to self-publish anything more ambitious than this letter (or have I now forfeited the rights to you?), you have still inspired me in my profession. I'm a massage therapist (you may remember the offer of a massage when your U.S. tour brought you to New York two (?) years ago). I know the parallels don't leap right out at you, but your focused and passionate thinking about your work has inspired me to think about mine. Massage is the only thing I've ever undertaken at which I am truly excellent. And on multiple occasions, while reading your columns, I have paused to consider those very same themes in my own work. All of this lest you think your influence is limited to comics and publishing.

That's all (that's plenty) for today.

Enjoy!

Tony Siacotos
250 Martine Avenue, Suite 6F
White Plains, NY
USA 10601

The thing is, there's nothing wrong with that picture. Rape figures prominently in every 'women's' book I've ever read. It's one of the few genuine interests shared by both genders. Women want to ban pornography; why not start with a ban on rape in romance novels? Women buy 99.9% of the romance novels (probably more). It wouldn't be that difficult, would it? Can you say 'disingenuous'? Ah, there, I knew you could do it.

★★★★★★★★★★

Nicole Kolisch
c/o Aardvark Comment

Dear Nicole,

While I don't actually *disagree* with anything you say in your letter, I just wanna ask if you think having to stop to pick hairs off your tongue, or hack 'em up from the top of your throat is especially "wonderful", "joyful" or "exciting"?

Chris Breach
P.O. Box 89
Pennant Hills
NSW 2120
Australia

That's tellin' 'er.

★★★★★★★★★★

Hi, Dave,

We met briefly at the Indianapolis signing; I handed you a stack of photos showing a block wall painted to resemble a brick comic-tragic mask set. Handling those photos was intended to give you a small break from constant signing and sketching. By the way, thanks for the Jaka (you too, Ger) and *Cerebus* head sketches in the phone books I bought at the show.

I didn't discover *Cerebus* on my own. Around the beginning of *High Society* I found myself managing a Pizza Hut. One of my cooks turned me on to the little grey guy, and *Cerebus* is the only title I've bought consistently in the intervening years. I'd like to thank that cook; sorry about the swiss-cheese memory losing your name — you know who you are — thanks for pointing out *Cerebus* and *Quack!*, and hope life's treating you well.

At the Grateful Dead show in Chicago recently, the Simpsons made an appearance on the computer-animation screen. I'd like to see Operation Crazed Ferret pop up sometime. Jerry's been known to read the comic, so if this sees print there is at least some chance of this happening. (Hi, Jerry — congrats on your wedding!)

Does anybody out there know where I can locate copies of issues no. 5 & 6? I've got the phone books and the *Swords* reprints, but have been unsuccessful in locating these two to complete my collection. I may have to settle for the biweeklies.

A while back I noticed a number of writers mentioning becoming hooked on the aardvark during the throes of a breakup. When a friend was in that situation I loaned out my phone books and gained another follower, a person who's never read comics. Couples break up all the time. Cerebus as therapist. Or was that Cerebus the rapist? Oh, that's right, Astoria "provoked" him.

I really enjoy my monthly fix, but the story reads much better in large chunks. I couldn't wait for *Melmoth* to be over, but rereading it while a friend's mother wasted away was gut-wrenching. *Jaka's Story* flew by in the phone book. Number 181 came out today, and it's beginning to feel like 300 will be here all too soon.

Thanks for the ride,

Mike Rice
34–B Country Squire
West Lafayette, IN
USA 47906

Jerry Garcia got married? Oh, man.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Given a choice between **a)** a poorly written, poorly drawn creator-owned comic book and **b)** a well-written, well-drawn comic book produced by work-for-hire labor, I'll take the latter. That's why I don't buy any Image comics.

But, now that I look at my "buy" list, I don't see any work-for-hire comics either. I just don't use who *owns* the work as a deciding factor in whether to buy it or not. My criteria all revolve around my personal, subjective opinions about what I find to be good entertainment value, in the writing and art, for my money.

Does that make me part of the problem, or part of the solution?

I could have written this letter to Todd McFarlane instead of you, Dave, but I don't think Todd gives a fuck about my opinion. I figured you were a lot more likely to at least be interested.

One of the guys doing *The Cerebus Companion* called me after you passed along to him a copy of "Cerebus: Halftime Report," and told me that it didn't look like the kind of material he'd be interested in using in his 'zine. No biggie to me, because the Halftime Report was seen by all the audience I'd originally intended it for: you, Gerhard, and the membership of CAPA-Alpha. But if this letter does wind up in Aardvark Comment, I might as well mention that I've got seven or eight copies left over, and I'll sell 'em, with your blessing, for $10 each postpaid. (Remember, all you double-baggers, that this is probably the only printing that will ever exist of a 30-something-page fanzine that gives summaries of The First Half of the Work-in-Progress (#1–150) issue by issue.)

Sorry I missed you in San Diego last year; I went in 1992 and plan to attend this year. (CAPA-Alpha turns 30 years old this October, and a lot of us are congregating in San Diego to celebrate in style.)

I look forward to finding out what Cirin does with Cerebus' wrist now that she's caught it. Take care, okay?

Best –

Rusty Crump
2911 S. Lamar Blvd.
Oxford, MS
USA 38655

That address in Oxford, Mississippi, again, is 2911 S. Lamar Blvd. . . . oh, hell. Read it for yourself — it's right up there, f'cryin' out loud.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

Ugh, this letter is painful to write. Hopefully you've forgotten the long and brainless letter I wrote you a month or two back where I spent much of my verbiage trashing the last five years or so of *Cerebus* and mooning over the passing of the "good old days". Unfortunately, *I* haven't forgotten. This business of writing fanboy letters to comic books is a risky one. If you manage to capture your thoughts correctly and eloquently, then you've lucked out. If, however, you manage to make a fool of yourself (like I did), then you spend the next several weeks kicking yourself and hoping desperately that your letter was either lost in the mail, or totally disregarded on the other end. If you *really* screwed up, you get your arsenic ready and prepare for the unspeakable — the publication of your letter. Fortunately, my letter escaped the latter (at least, thus far).

My problem was that after reading so many years' worth of *Cerebus* in such a short span of time, I simply felt compelled to write you *something*. I didn't really have a clue what I wanted to say, but I was darn set on saying it. Big mistake. Since that time I've been gradually re-acquiring and rereading the entire *Cerebus*

story line. Hoo boy, was I all wet. Without being long-winded and rambling (again), let me just assure you that I had no idea what I was talking about when I hinted that your best work was behind you. Either my memory is completely shot or my tastes have changed drastically over the years (or both). Whatever the case, the re-experiencing of those early stories was quite an eye-opener. Yes, there was the occasional "haha", and, yes, it was fun to watch your development as an artist and a storyteller, but compared to the work you are doing today, well, they pale in comparison.

The real kicker is that I just finished #181, which I read cover to cover (including the Viktor pages). Oh, man, now I'm really embarrassed. In "the letter from hell" not only did I criticize you for wasting pages on a lot of pictureless prose (none of which I'd read), but I suggested that you might want to add an autobiographical section to the book . . . ouch.

Well, anyway. I'm up to about #85 at the moment. I plan to continue my reread all the way back up to the present, and this time I plan to read everything along the way. If I ever decide to write you again, I'll stick to "short" and "amusing". But, should I decide to brave the deeper waters again, expect that I will at least read everything before shooting off my stupid mouth.

Hopefully I'm making a bigger deal out of this than needs be made. In a perfect world you're sitting there saying, "Now what letter is this nut talking about? Like I even remember them ten minutes after I read them." In that case, never mind. At least I feel a little bit better now, having made my apologies.

Regards,

Mark Peterson
4833 2nd Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN
USA 55409

Well, actually, I did remember the letter, Mark. Thanks for writing this one. It was one of the first reactions to the second half of *Reads* that I got in, so at least I knew *one* of the twenty thousand was getting his money's worth.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Hope you got back all right. Nice night. Next time we go straight to the Park Bar and join in the songs earlier. I sort of wonder how many letters which start like this you get after each tour. I was along at the Glasgow leg, along with Big Ian (you let him drive you?), and enjoyed your rendition of "There was a sojer, a Scottish sojer" (sad news about Andy Stewart) at least as much as you enjoyed my Talisker. A nice night, haste ye back. As you may have noticed from the address, I'm a Geordie by formation now, but still a Glaswegian at heart.

On with the show. *Cerebus* remains my number one 'entertainment' in the Graham Greene mode, as well as the source of a good belly laugh or two: 'Right, who wants to die first' was like the return of an old friend (matched only by Reggie Perrin's re-acquaintance with the hippo, in terms of incongruous satisfaction). I'm in two minds about the 'Yellow Book' portion of *Reads*. Roughly: I don't give a shit about the politics (personal or economic) of 'independent' comics publishing. These are obviously matters of great importance to you, your fellow creators, industry (ha, call that an industry) people and, presumably, a whole lot of your readers (I wonder how many *Cerebus* readers are wannabe creators? A British SF magazine found about 80% of its subscribers hoped to become published writers). I'm quite prepared to believe I'm in a minority on this one, but I enjoyed the allegorised (what?) Petuniacon to this more documentary-like approach. On the other hand, I like the Dave Sim biography (hell, I always enjoy letters from friends). So, **yeah**, self-justificatory soul-baring and **yah-boo sucks** to politics.

(Having now read to 180 I withdraw my caveats. Your cautionary tale on leasing/leashing your muse transcended the milieu of comics. My congratulations and thanks.)

Do I have to talk about the feminist/new man/mother-baiting/pussy-whipped stuff? Oh, OK. I thought Danny Livingston had some important things to say, which you sidestepped. Danny, by the way, is a lovely human being, a good father to his overdraft and a welcome drinking buddy. But he really shouldn't build a thesis by quoting Harlan Ellison, a man fully capable of advocating baby-eating as a social occasion.

But.

Shit, where was I?

Oh, yes, the PC, matriarchial thang. Am I right in seeing the former as a creature of the latter? Oh, right, thanks.

Sorry to say this, but I think the whole storm-in-a-beer-glass is funny. Funny ha-ha.

All these guys, moaning and whining about female oppression, and how their delicate male egos (and hard-ons) are wilting under the scorn and contempt of these nasty bad wimmin, most of whom won't even sleep with them, or not more than once (surprise, dick-brain!) and who also totally fail to realise the fundamental role of fellation in sexual equality. Guys, get a life.

Male/female relationships are sort of a one-on-one thing. Don't whine about it in letters to a comic book, buy some acne cream. Don't develop conspiracy theories, lose some weight. Learn to use make-up. Dress better. Flatter your dates. Laugh at their jokes. Conceal your intelligence. Be a good homemaker. Play hard to get. Giggle a lot. Live with it, guys; the '90s are going to be a real bitch for nerds (hey, everybody, I said bitch).

OK, OK, I exaggerate, but, jeez, you matriarchist-conspiracy-theorist buffs are worse than Marxists; you got to drag it in everywhere.

I also think that we're talking about different things on different sides of the Pond. PC is a joke here, Camille Paglaccia a source of baffled amusement. Having visited the States recently (hello, Ann Arbor), I can see a bit of the hysteria being whipped up over there, but, really, I have worse things to worry about: a Government who won't die of shame, my wedding, Bosnia, unemployment 'Back to Basics'; sorry, but the sad whining of a bunch of no-hope weenies doesn't convince me that **this** is the way the world ends. Where's the fucking danger? Who's being oppressed? Does it hurt? Are you being damaged by this, or do you just feel peeved?

Thanks for bringing all this up, Dave; argument is the lifeblood of art (Praif conflic!) and I don't often see the other side expressed with such eloquence. I disagree with what you say, but I'll keep on buying your comic to the death

(you know what I mean).

Sorry about the rant, and, of course, don't take it personally. I have nothing but respect for you as a creative being, and I just love your comic book. (Seriously, I think you and P.J. O'Rourke are the only writers I can laugh with while my own prejudices are having the shit kicked out of them. A superior Entertainment, all round.)

I'm playing a bit of catch-up now, since I just got the latest Cerubi (at least as far as First Blood). Sorry to see Elrod poit out, he **was** my third favourite character. On the other hand, the gender-bender thunderbolt was very welcome. Talk about turning a character upside down. I think I enjoyed this almost as much as the penultimate moment in Iain Banks' *Wasp Factory*, and your aim is more ambitious. Cats, pigeons, stuff like that. Small peeve is that when I asked why Astoria wasn't pregnant, you said, "Because she doesn't want to be." Obfuscation or downright lie? I think we should be told.

I must admit to being a latecomer to the bash, a browser since 30-something and a regular since 60 or so.

You may be a little misled on the dismantling of English Common Law leading to a withering away of intellectual copyright. Not all legal systems are based on common law, and I'm sure just as much justification (with equal validity, or lack of such) could be drawn from Roman Law-derived systems (such as the Dutch, South African, Scottish and, at one remove, French legal systems) from Communist-derived systems, or, for that matter, religious codes. What chance of freedom of expression or creation under a justly applied Islamic system? Don't think new media will lead to freedom of any sort of press. Law is only an expression of the social contract, after all, and the cyber-speed-cops are already laying radar traps on the information highway.

I think I'd better finish now, but I thought I'd make one of those synchronistic lists of things that keep interweaving my life and your funnybook: Whisky, chess, law, Ann Arbor, Glasgow, Big Ian, "Cerebus is still alive, and loves you very much", Daniel Livingstone, John and Jane, pins in Paris, Lobbey Dosser and George Thorogood. There, I enjoyed that . . .

To crime!

Michael Mooney
26 Stokesley Grove, High Heaton
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE7 7AU

Hey, if you're really serious about getting eaten up by one of them, Michael has just given you some very solid advice. Thanks, Michael.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Have you ever had one of those weeks where things continue to go your way, one after another, to the point where you almost become dizzy with the sensation of euphoria, and are almost unable to handle it all?

I've been having a week like that. It all started Wednesday when I found out, after an almost two-month process, that I'd been selected to be an intern with *Billboard* magazine this summer in New York City. New York, Dave! The Big Apple! It's almost too good to be true. I keep expecting the folks in charge to call me back and say "I'm sorry, we meant *Rick* Dirga." With a minimal amount of conceit, I think that I almost feel as if the potential I've always felt I had is somehow being finally recognized and acted upon. The sky's the limit, Dave.

Then, that night, I went to a Smashing Pumpkins concert with Rebecca, and had an incredible time. As I thrashed about in the mosh pit, I could almost taste the future that seemed arrayed out before me.

And then! Friday, I went to Memphis to do laundry at the parents' (Free Laundry!) and to get my comics-addiction fix. I bought the latest *Cerebus*, of course, and took it home to read. As I flipped through it, I came across a stunningly familiar picture in the letters section — could that be *my* Prometheus and Rambunny characters with a certain little aardvark in a picture by my partner-in-self-publishing-crimes, Max Ink? Sure enough, it was! Max hadn't even mentioned to me that he'd sent you this letter, so it came as a complete shock for me. To see these characters that I've labored over for the last eight years or so suddenly emblazoned in a nationally distributed comic by one of my idols was none other than total vindication. The writer's block, the trying-to-learn-how-to-draw (I'm about 4,000 drawings through those 10,000 bad, Dave) decently, dealing with the badly reproduced photocopies of my small-press comic *Amoeba Adventures* (14 issues and counting), the fanciful daydreams of an eventual black and white, independent, self-published *Amoeba Adventures* comic . . . these all seemed utterly and totally worthwhile in the moment that I saw my "babies" in *Cerebus* #181.

Thanks, Dave. Oh, and t'anks to dat Max guy, too . . . see ya, partner.

(I'd write more, but drawing #4001 beckons, Dave! Keep up the superlative work!)

Nik Dirga
P.O. Box 2230
University, MS
USA 38677-2230

Yeah, the last month has been like that for me. Just an unbelievable sense of well-being, comfortable-in-your-own-skin, Stanley-Cup-playoffs-every-night-of-the-week-on-three-different-channels kind of thing. Now I've probably jinxed it. Nice way to end a letters page, though, don't you think? Yeah, me too.

PERSONAL APPEARANCES 1994

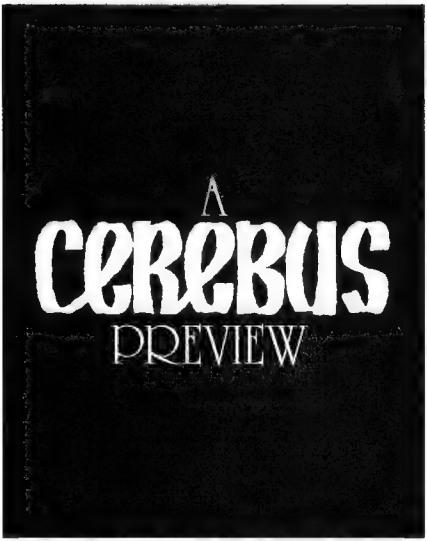
JULY 29–31
DALLAS, TX
DALLAS FANTASY FAIR
Dallas Market Hall

•

SEPTEMBER 24
SASKATOON, SASK.
Tramp's Music & Books

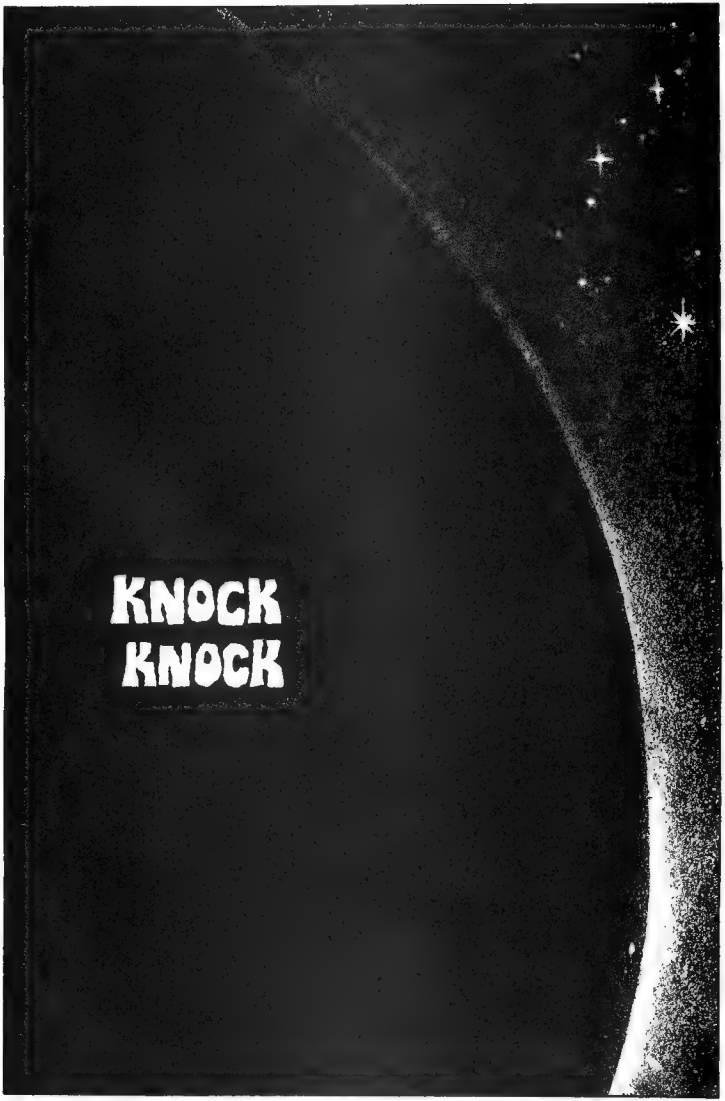
•

OCTOBER 4–19
Aardvarks Over Germany Tour '94
(dates to be announced)
Contact:
Lou Novacheck
WIZARD COMICS
(49) 6371-63591

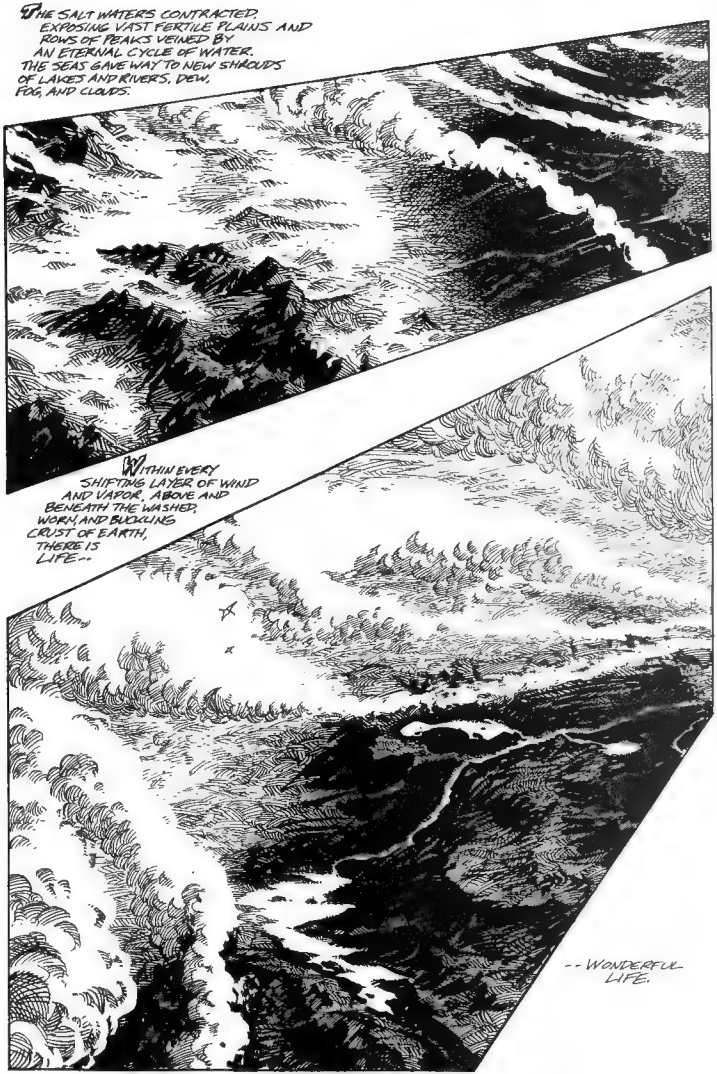


Stephen R. Bissette's TYRANT has been in the works for a long, long time. I don't know why it was, but I took to Steve in a big way after meeting him at a UK Comic Art Convention in London. Through financing the first volume of *Taboo*, we discovered together the inherent impossibility of successfully publishing an anthology of that kind. It was also my last experiment in publishing someone else's work (apart from these Previews). As Steve drifted towards Kevin Eastman's ill-fated Tundra experiment, our friendship became an ongoing phone debate about the possibility of running a publishing company on an ethical basis. It took many, many years and every permutation of the Advance Game, the Royalty Game, etc., etc for Steve to arrive at the conclusion that it was *not* possible. Different things went wrong, but something *always* went wrong and his only choice was to capitulate or walk away. Halfway through *TYRANT*'s first issue, Steve told me that he had worked on a page and for the first time since the early days on *Swamp Thing*, he felt himself giving one hundred per cent. It wasn't until that moment that he realized the price he had paid in dealing with traditional companies: he had closed off a vital, creative part of himself as a defense mechanism. For the first time since his early twenties he had his full enthusiasm back and was hitting on all cylinders. It wasn't until *that* moment, when he told me, that I was certain my advocacy of self publishing was not just the egocentric ravings of a provocateur. Dave Sim and *Cerebus* were not an exception to be explained away (it works for Sim but no one else can do it, as publishers big and small were fond of saying in the pre-*Bone* days). If the *Cerebus* storyline is forgotten two weeks after it's completed in March 2004 I can safely say that that moment made it all worthwhile.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the comic book Stephen R. Bissette was born to draw: *TYRANT!*


KNOCK
KNOCK

SUNRISE OVER A LATE CRETACEOUS OCEAN... IT IS THE MOST RECENT IN A SUCCESSION OF SEAS WHICH HAVE SHIMMERED ACROSS THE CONTINENTAL INTERIOR IN THIRTY MILLION YEARS.
TEN MILLION YEARS AGO, THE OCEAN'S WESTERN SHORES HAD ALMOST LAPPED THE FEET OF THE GROWING RANGE OF SHARPENED ROCKY PEAKS.


THE SALT WATERS CONTRACTED,
EXPOSING VAST FERTILE PLAINS AND
ROWS OF PEAKS VEINED BY
AN ETERNAL CYCLE OF WATER.
THE SEAS GAVE WAY TO NEW SHROUDS
OF LAKES AND RIVERS, DEW,
FOG, AND CLOUDS.
WITHIN EVERY
SHIFTING LAYER OF WIND
AND VAPOR, ABOVE AND
BENEATH THE WASHED,
WORN, AND BUCKLING
CRUST OF EARTH,
THERE IS
LIFE--
--WONDERFUL
LIFE.

There are dragons gliding over the open land sprawled between the ocean's shores and the western mountains.
They drift inland with the furrows of the rivers, hovering over the many scattered lakes.
A few venture beyond the plains into the steaming tropic interior, in search of dawn past.

OTHERS OF HER KIND PLUNGE TOWARD SANDY SHORELINES TO FEED UPON THE TENDER CRABS AND MOLLUSKS WHICH PICK CLEAN THE NIGHTWASH.

SHE HUNGERS FOR MORE-- THE FRESH REMNANTS OF A NIGHT KILL STILL WET WITH BLOOD AND MARROW AND TEAMING WITH EASILY DISMATCHED SCAVENGERS, OR LAKE CATCH STOLEN FROM TINY FISHING DRAGONS.

FLEXING THE COLLAGEN RIBBING THAT SUPPORTS HER GREAT WINGS, SHE CAPTURES A SWEET, WARM UPDRAFT AND SOARS ONWARD.

HER TINY ANCESTORS STABILIZED FLIGHT WITH ELONGATED TAILS. BUT SHE IS A MORE SOPHISTICATED AND AMBITIOUS FLYER.

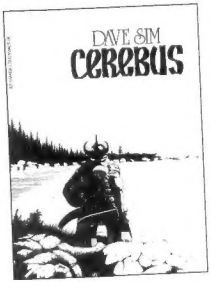
WITH INSTINCTIVE PRECISION, SHE SUBTLY SHIFTS AND PITCHES HER WINGS, COCKING HER HEAD UNTIL --

--THERE.
BELOW.

SHE CAN SEE IT SO CLEARLY NOW.
THE CARCASS IS CLOSE TO THE TREE LINE, BUT SHE EFFORTLESSLY SHORTS ITS EDGE.
SHE SMELLS DECAY AND FECES.
IT IS RIPE.
SHE CAN TASTE IT--
ONLY THE SNAP OF HER GREAT WINGS BETRAYS HER FINAL APPROACH.
NOTHING CAN KEEP HER FROM IT NOW--
--NOTHING CAN STOP HER--

--NOTHING.
EEEE

CEREBUS: THE FIRST HALF

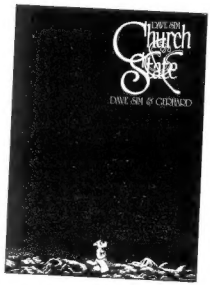


CEREBUS reprints Cerebus 1 to 25
500 pages $25

The Cerebus volume introduces the cast of characters including Elrod the Albino, Red Sophia, Jaka, the Cockroach (later Captain Cockroach with Elrod as Bunky the Albino), Lord Julius, President Weisshaupt and many more.

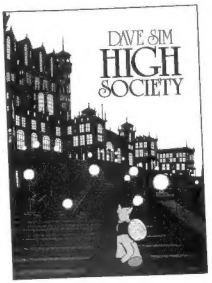
HIGH SOCIETY reprints Cerebus 26 to 50
500 pages $25

Cerebus gets swept up into the world of high power politics in lest and runs for Prime Minister. Introduces Astoria, Filgate, Blakely, the Regency Elf, Dirty Fleagle and his brother Dirty Drew McGrew, Duke Leonardi. The Roach becomes Moon Roach and Sergeant Preston of the Royal Mounted lestan police.



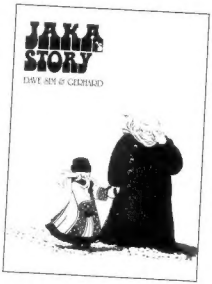
CHURCH & STATE Vol. I & II
reprints Cerebus 51 to 111
1200 pages $30 ea.

One of the longest single stories in the history of comics. Manipulated by President Weisshaupt, Cerebus finds himself married and then finds himself as Pope of the Eastern Church! Introduces Mrs. Henrot-Gutch (Cerebus' mother-in-law), Boobah, Bear, Bishop Powers, Bishop Posey, Mick and Keef and many more. The Roach becomes Wolveroach and the Secret Sacred Wars Roach. Also, in volume II, is the Flaming Carrot cross-over.



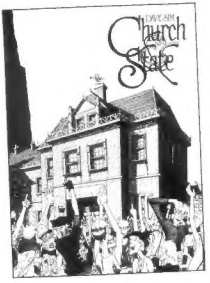
JAKA'S STORY reprints Cerebus 114 to 136
500 pages $25

Cerebus returns to find his life in ruins and ends up as a houseguest of the love of his life, Jaka, and her new husband Rick. Introduces Oscar the poet, Pud, the tavern-owner, and Mrs. Thatcher.



MELMOTH reprints Cerebus 139 to 150
250 pages $17

Cerebus, mistakenly believing that Jaka is dead, takes up residence in Dino's Cafe, clutching Jaka's childhood doll, Missy and his sword. The other half of the story is a faithful retelling of the last days of Oscar Wilde. The Roach becomes normalroach. Introduces Doris, Dino, Janice, Robbie and Reggie. Cameo appearances by Mick and Keef.

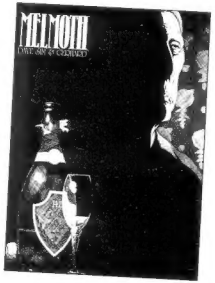


THE SECOND HALF BEGINS IN 1993:

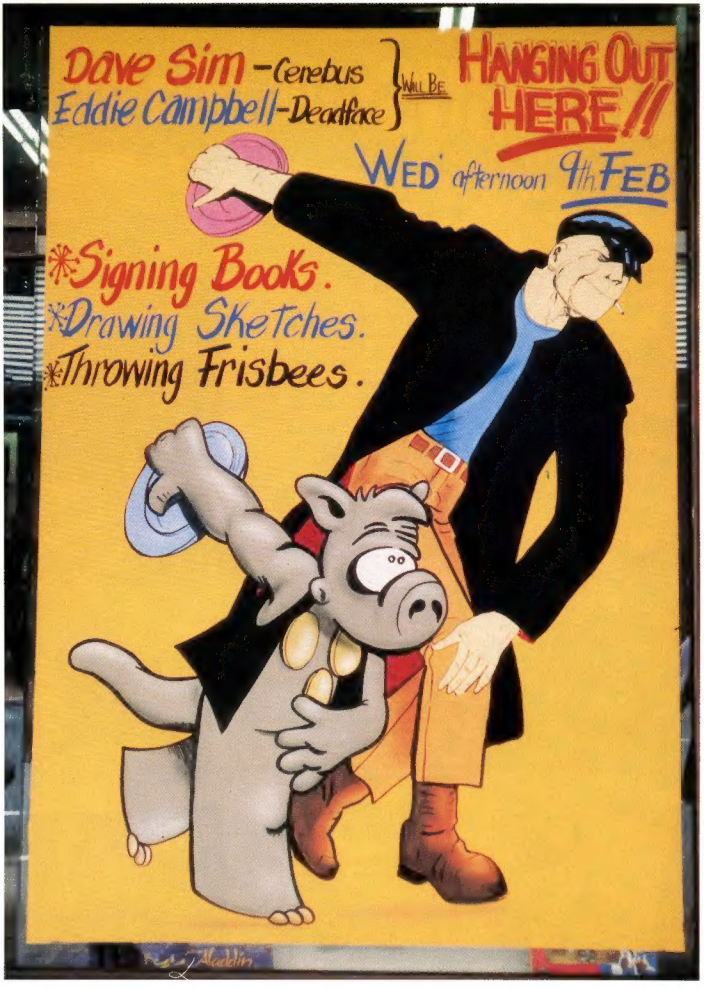
FLIGHT reprinting Cerebus 151 to 162
250 pages ($17)

and

CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO
(reprinting the 'in-between' stories from Cerebus 51, 112/113 and 137-138) ($2.25)



AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC.
Box 1674, Station C,
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 4R2
519-576-7820
or
519-576-0610



Window display at *COMICS ETC.*, Brisbane, Australia — February 1994.